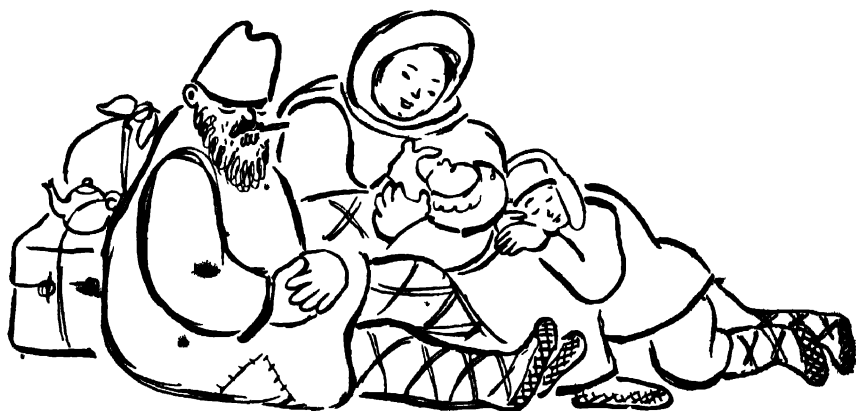


# MISHA AND MASHA

STORIES AND DRAWINGS

By PEARL BINDER



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**For My Friends**

**D. N. PRITT, K.C., M.P.**

**and**

**MOLLY PRITT**





## *Preface*

These eight people are chosen at random. They and their life-stories are fact, the names only, in a few cases, being fictitious. The drawings depict contemporary Soviet life.

I want to thank my good friend and interpreter, Paya Haskellson, for her invaluable help in the preparation of this book.

PEARL BINDER

*Moscow, 1936*



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*Anna Semyonovna*









## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . . . .	a student of economics
AUNT LISA . . . .	her mother's sister, a revolutionary
UNCLE KLIM . . . .	her mother's brother, a revolutionary
YULI } . . . .	her sisters
IRINA }	
PAPA . . . . .	her father, a business-man
MOTHER . . . . .	her mother
VLADIMIR CONSTANTINOVITCH	her husband
LYENKA } . . . .	her children
ANDREI }	
ANNA ALEXANDROVNA . . .	her housekeeper
GENIA . . . . .	an ex-thief
KALININ . . . . .	President of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
KAGANOVITCH . . . . .	Commissar of Transport
TROTSKY . . . . .	One-time Member of the Political Bureau of the U.S.S.R. Now, counter-revolutionary, in exile
LENIN . . . . .	Leader of the Russian Communist Party



## *Anna Semyonovna*

**V**ILNA. A bitter night in mid-winter. Anna Semyonovna is a little girl sitting with her feet out in the huge plush armchair in the drawing-room. The lamp spills soft yellow light over the round table and the porcelain stove gleaming warmly in the corner. Mother and Aunt Lisa are at the piano playing a duet. Bach's clear music beats out into the quiet room.

The little girl sits quite still, enraptured, holding her breath so that Mother and Aunt Lisa will forget she is there and not send her off to bed. Her eyelids droop heavily. She is more than half asleep already. She wants the tranquil music to go on for ever. She wakes up next morning in her own bed where Aunt Lisa has carried her, fast asleep.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Summer. The woods near Vilna. The little girl and Uncle Klim are taking a walk through the green forest. He is home from his University in St. Petersburg for the summer vacation. The scene

student's tunic stiffens him like military uniform. He is already deep in illegal political work amongst the St. Petersburg workers. Under the crest of black hair his dark eyes are grave and troubled. Uncle Klim is thin and upright and talks earnestly. The little girl is very happy to be walking in the forest with Uncle Klim to whom she can always tell everything in her mind, who always understands her and treats her like a grown-up. She tells him breathlessly how she loves the forest and how she would like to live all her life quietly amongst books and trees.

Uncle Klim tells her how in St. Petersburg University the students are struggling for freedom to study, how the factory workers of St. Petersburg are struggling for the right to learn. Uncle Klim says that the forest should not be an escape from reality, that in all the big cities, where the rich are savagely oppressing the poor, there is a tremendous struggle going on. When man shall have freed himself, when he no longer wastes his strength fighting himself, only then can we truly turn to explore the secrets of nature. Uncle Klim and Anna Semyonovna both love reading, but the little girl likes books more than people and Uncle Klim likes people more than anything.

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Autumn. The end of the vacation. Uncle Klim is packing his few shirts and his books and papers into the straw bag to return to St. Petersburg. Aunt Lisa has come to say good-bye to him. Mother has put Yuli in her cradle while she prepares *butterbrot* for her brother's journey. The little girl is sad because Uncle Klim is going away. Suddenly, a violent thumping on the door. Hoarse voices. Hammering of rifle butts. It is the police. They have come to arrest Uncle Klim.



Without a word he puts a bundle of papers into the hands of the little girl. Without being told she knows what to do. Fast, fast the police are threatening to break down the door. She runs to Yuli's wooden cradle and hides the papers carefully underneath the bed clothes. The police break in, seize Uncle Klim and begin to ransack the house. Aunt Lisa stands with folded arms by her brother. Mother and the three children huddle round the cradle. The little girl makes no sound, no movement, only her round eyes follow them. Irina, a year younger, cries pitifully. Mother tries to comfort her. The baby wakes up and cries too. The straw bag is torn to shreds. Uncle Klim's few clothes and books and photographs are trampled on and kicked aside savagely. The police find nothing. The sandwiches, torn from their paper, are strewn

all over the room. Uncle Klim has no time to say good-bye. He is dragged out, to prison and exile, between two armed policemen. His last glance is for the little girl. Their eyes meet confidently.

★   ★   ★   ★   ★

Anna Semyonovna didn't see her Uncle Klim much. He was so often in prison or in exile. So was Aunt Lisa. They would be released, take up their revolutionary work, again be arrested and thrown back into jail. Uncle Klim was not afraid of anything and conducted all his illegal work audaciously. Aunt Lisa, on the other hand, was always extremely quiet and cautious. But it made no difference. Whether there was evidence or not, the police always caught them.

All the years he was in prison Uncle Klim went on studying. He learned three languages in his cell, studied law there and made careful translations of John Locke's *Treatises on Government* and *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. His health was always perfect. Even in Siberia in mid-winter he went about without gloves and without an overcoat. Nothing seemed to harm him. All his strength and vitality went steadily in one direction. Nothing distracted nor deflected him. Out of prison he organised workers' study circles and edited secret revolutionary papers. The St. Petersburg workers loved him and sought him out as a friend. He was always so clear and easy to understand.

Neither he nor Aunt Lisa ever married, they were too much taken up with revolutionary work. Their sister was the only one of the three to marry. Uncle Klim watched over the growth of Anna Semyonovna, his eldest niece, with steadfast care, as though he saw even then, before 1900, the course their lives were destined to take.

Papa was extremely handsome, but without Mother's intelli-

gence and courage. Papa made enough money for them to live without discomfort. The house was well kept and there was always good food to eat, though never any luxury. Their furniture was wooden and massive. There was an abundance of good linen and all the household towels from Mother's trousseau were beautifully embroidered in red cross-stitch with poems from Pushkin. Papa only wanted his children to be pretty and entertaining, but plain, hard-working Mother made giant efforts to give them all a university education.

Anna Semyonovna from the beginning was a strong, able child. She loved to chop up the logs for the stove and, to Papa's horror, insisted every winter on breaking up the ice in the courtyard with a crowbar. For three years she managed a hen-coop with a hundred fowls, which was the pride and pleasure of her life. Early every morning behind a big pinafore she would clean out the nests. She cooked the fowls special food herself and every evening she would rush home straight from school to prepare their supper. Gratefully these petted birds produced large white eggs all the year round. Without a pang of sentiment, when the moment came, Anna Semyonovna would hand over the selected chickens to her mother for the pot.

Papa was ashamed when his self-possessed child of nine walked through the house in her daubed pinafore, carrying an earthenware bowl of hen mash, especially when he had guests. *Malchishka* he called her reproachfully. But even then she was stronger than he. He couldn't stop her. He was less real to her than Uncle Klim was.

Irina, his second daughter, a year younger only, was much more to his taste. She was prettier than Anna Semyonovna, and though she wore exactly the same school dresses, spent twice as long over her toilet. She had coquettish little ways that pleased

other men besides Papa, and intrigued prettily for favours. Papa felt in a bewildered way that Irina's vanity was more natural and was distressed when Mother insisted on her receiving an education too.

Irina, from the beginning, loved fine clothes and pined for expensive flowers and jewels. She knew she could please and longed to marry a wealthy nobleman. She was envious of the ladies of St. Petersburg who lived only for pleasure.

Neither of the girls was at all sentimental. Irina, in her own way, was not less a realist than Anna. When the two girls planned their lives, brushing their hair by candlelight in the quiet of their bedroom, Irina wanted lovely clothes and wealthy suitors. Anna, quite as definitely, wanted to study and make a career for herself.

After the failure of the 1905 Revolution, there was a pogrom of the Jews and intellectuals in Vilna, and by the time Anna Semyonovna won her scholarship of twenty-five roubles a month to Kiev University, reaction had taken a firm grip on the life of the students. Many of them abandoned the struggle for freedom altogether. It was the fashion amongst the students to be pessimistic, to write romantic unhappy poetry, to seek escape in talk of suicide and in sexual adventures. In contrast to the ascetic life of the few revolutionary students, wholesale drunkenness on vodka was now common and pornographic literature, under the guise of romantic novels, were the only books that the rest bothered to read.

Anna Semyonovna's childish figure had already taken on soft curves. She was dark, with heavy-lidded radiant eyes, and the small precise features of an Ingres beauty. The students pursued her and wrote poems to her, swearing she was cold because she was too well-balanced to be swept away on the dangerous current. Nevertheless, the loose atmosphere of the university had a damp-



ing effect on her natural gaiety. She chose economics as her subject and flung herself wholeheartedly into her work. When Uncle Klim came home from prison she began to work actively with him and, when he was rearrested, she took on his work as well as she could. Irina, attracted by the gay social life of Warsaw, had begged to study medicine there.

As the World War approached, the savagery and repression of the Tzarist Government became increasingly severe. The students had no liberties at all and many of them were too dispirited even to want any. Anna Semyonovna had often smuggled batches of *Iskra*<sup>1</sup> for her uncle past the Vilna police in her school satchel on her way to school. Now she studied at one of his illegal study circles. Never more than five people attended. Each one came secretly. Never the same room twice. Always there were glasses and vodka on the table, evidence of a Saint's day party should the police break in. It was tedious, difficult, dangerous work, but the only possible way. Spies and provocateurs infected every factory. At best only one worker could be brought into the Movement from each factory. Him they taught patiently to read and write, instructed him in Marxism and simple economics. Often the teacher was but one lesson ahead of the worker he was teaching. And this worker, secretly, and with infinite caution, would gradually win over another worker in the same factory. It was from these clumsy beginnings that, in a few short years, in the teeth of the most fanatic oppression, the giant workers' revolutionary movement grew up to carry through the successful October Revolution. They didn't know it then. Not Anna Semyonovna, nor Uncle Klim, nor the countless revolutionaries who faced the sabres of the Black Hundreds or languished in Siberia, ever dreamed that they would see in their lifetime the workers actually

<sup>1</sup> Illegal revolutionary Russian newspaper published outside Russia.

take power in St. Petersburg and the red flag float over the Kremlin.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Irina, revelling in the exotic social life of Warsaw, was in her second year. Anna Semyonovna had already taken her degree in economics. She carried her student life with her to Moscow when she got her first job in the statistical department of a big insurance company. She lived in one small room lined with books and very modestly furnished, dashing from her room to her work, and from her work to evening classes every night. She was happy. Her life was full. She was earning her living and learning hard all the time.

Uncle Klim came out of prison just before the outbreak of war. He at once wrote a manifesto against the War, which Anna Semyonovna and he pasted up by night all over Moscow. He was promptly arrested and thrown back into Taganka Jail for two years.

Everybody knew the Government was tottering. The least politically-minded clerks in every shabby office talked openly of the folly of the War. Everywhere waste and destruction. At Court the wildest orgies centred round Rasputin . . . the Tzar, stupefied, gripped by the imperial madness of the Tzaritsa. Demonstrations. Unrest in all the cities. Strikes. Bigger demonstrations.

Anna Semyonovna's room in Moscow became a refuge for revolutionaries without a passport hiding from the police. Often Uncle Klim would appear suddenly with one or other of his comrades, men and women, stay a few nights, and disappear again. There was a camp bed ready in the corner, and a bite of food on the table. Only the essentials. No questions were asked. Anna Semyonovna, the quiet, neatly-dressed young clerk, going smoothly

to and from her daily work, excited no suspicion.

One of the people who came with Uncle Klim was a young revolutionary named Vladimir Constantinovitch. He had served a long sentence in Siberia with Uncle Klim who was devoted to him. Vladimir was not at all good-looking. His face was commonplace and good-humoured. He wore round glasses. He had an implacable resolution and integrity nevertheless, only matched by that of Uncle Klim. Anna Semyonovna saw him frequently during the turbulent years of the War. Always he arrived late at night, rarely alone. Spent and exhausted he dropped off at once on the crib in the corner and was away again before dawn.



Suddenly they were in love with each other, with a sureness and intensity such as few lovers experience. For a long time she told no one and no one knew, no one suspected, not even Uncle Klim. She was proud and reserved in her secret.

They hardly ever met, only for the barest moment in between secret and often dangerous work. The tiny room, with its rows of books and neat files of statistical documents, with its secret corners where illegal papers were hidden, was the scene of the most exalted moments of her life. They had no quiet intervals to brood over their emotions, no time to dissect the quality of their love. They were both hard at work all day and most of the night. They trusted each other as old revolutionaries had learned to know how to trust each other. Anna Semyonovna went about her work with a heightened perception that was to increase steadily into the most perfect experience of her life.

It is typical of her that she never once quarrelled with her husband nor, in all their years together, looked with desire at another man. She was no immature child when she loved. She was a practical, healthy young woman, modest, yet no prude, truthful, yet not lacking humour. She took love into her life calmly and gladly, as she took all knowledge. She had never sighed for it, nor chased after it. She knew instinctively how to let it grow by itself, in its own way, and she learned it with the eager interest that she learned all things. She fitted love into her full life and it drew all else together into a unity.

The office where she worked contained every variety of political opinion. There were Social-Revolutionaries, Anarchists, Social-Democrats and an ill-paid abacus-manipulator who was an uncompromising Tolstoyan. Every day, as the Tzarist Government tottered to its fall, the clerks did less and less work. Instead they held a heated political debate in the office from ten until

four. When the news came of the assassination of Rasputin the entire staff arrived laden with different newspapers. All day the violent arguments went on. Each had entirely different opinions to air and propositions to make, especially the Tolstoyan who, raising his voice the loudest, pleaded with uplifted hands and trembling beard that good government could only come by complete abstention from animal food. Anna Semyonovna enjoyed it all very much, brewing fresh pots of cheap Indian tea as one exhausted orator fell out to be immediately replaced by several others. She knew, whatever the ultimate outcome might be, where she stood and what she had to do.

The abacus lay neglected in the corner. Letters were left unopened. The purple ink dried in the heavy Government inkstand. Arguments. Arguments. Arguments. Arguments. And outside the band of tried men and women were rallying together from jail and exile waiting for their leader, a short, bald man, with ironic piercing eyes, to come from Switzerland.

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1917 Uncle Klim was released from Petropavelsk Dungeon. He immediately took on the editorship of the *Social-Democrat*. The work was not easy. The printers, the proof-readers, the couriers, many of whom held conflicting opinions, openly sabotaged the work. Money was irregular and of little value as food and fuel grew scarcer in the shops. Towards the end of February there was continuous shooting in the streets.

\*Anna Semyonovna, a white kerchief pulled over her hair so as to pass as a housemaid, slipped to and fro through the ominous city with newspaper proofs and messages. On one occasion she and Uncle Klim were constantly on the move for seven days,

without sleep, without washing, almost without food.

On the 28th of February the weeks of strain culminated in a terrifying episode which she was to remember all her life. She was out in the streets with Uncle Klim posting up the bills, they had themselves printed laboriously, calling in the name of the workers and peasants for the abandonment of the War. Everywhere police were lurking, disguised in civilian clothes, but easily recognisable by their burly figures and stout red faces.

Crowds and restless groups of people along the riverside, in all the side-streets, in every dark alley.

Suddenly a provocation. One of the police set up a familiar anti-Jew cry. There was a tense moment as the crowds quickly gathered into a struggling mass. A second either way, a scream, a pistol shot, and the revolutionary spirit of the mob might have been diverted into a mad riot of bloody anti-Semitism such as the experienced police had so often engineered before. It was a moment of terror for Anna Semyonovna. Not fear for herself nor for her Uncle but terror lest the course of the imminent revolution be deflected from its true purpose and wasted.

The moment passed. The crowd gradually dispersed. There was no panic. No pogrom. Those very workers lived to pull through their own Revolution in October.

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Anna Semyonovna had now joined the Party. The Tzar had fallen, and Kerensky's Provisional Government was making frantic efforts to continue the War. But the influence of the Bolshevik fraction was growing daily. The little man with the piercing eyes was back in St. Petersburg speaking from the balcony of the mansion which had belonged to the Tzar's mistress,

Kzhezhinskaya, the ballet-dancer. Every day crowds gathered below the balcony to listen to him.

He had no oratorical tricks. He never wore military uniform like Trotsky. He had no fine phrases, no theatrical gestures like Kerensky. His voice was prosaic, and he could not pronounce "R" properly. But he could explain to simple people what politics were all about. He could point a clear course through the hysteria and confusion. He could put into tangible form what they themselves thought and knew how to achieve what they themselves wanted. The workers believed in him. The suspicious peasants trusted him. "*Our Lenin*," they called him.

Strikes, mass meetings, floods of people marching with banners. The winter, the bitter Russian winter, was gathering the country into its icy grip.

Transport disorganised, food scarcer, the queues outside the shops lengthening and lengthening. Kerensky's trumpeted drive on the Eastern Front resulting in a shambles. Thirty thousand Russian soldiers, ill-clad, foodless, without ammunition, wiped out completely. A Cabinet crisis.

One vast cry seemed to resound from end to end of Russia. Everywhere it was whispered, shouted, blazoned on banners, it swept like forest fire through the army, through the fleet, through all the disintegrating factories, throughout the wasting, unreaped countryside :

"DOWN WITH THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT!!"

And again :

"ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS!!"

In St. Petersburg the Government was making frantic efforts to stem the mighty tide that was to sweep it away. Kerensky

publicly branded Lenin as a paid German agent. Telephone communications to Bolshevik organisations were cut off, the offices of Bolshevik newspapers were raided, smashed up and the doors sealed.

Futile efforts. Nothing could stop the Bolsheviks for they had the mass of the people behind them. Telephonographs replaced the cut wires. Red Guards broke open the newspaper offices and started the presses working again. The troops called in to suppress the rising workers deserted to the side of the workers. Even the Cossack regiments came over to the Revolutionaries.

Vladimir was in St. Petersburg when the Winter Palace was stormed and taken. The Provisional Government fell. And the real work of the Bolsheviks began.

There was a three-day battle in Moscow before the Kremlin was taken. Uncle Klim and Anna Semyonovna worked day and night at the print-shop, sweat pouring down their faces. They had to do everything themselves. News telephoned from Party Headquarters in St. Petersburg, had to be printed and circulated at once.

Firing. Running crowds of men and women with children. Snatched rifles. The smell of gunpowder in the nostrils. No sleep. Hasty mouthfuls of watery cabbage soup. Days without food. Endless messages to be taken and dispatched, on foot, through hostile streets, past armed enemies.

In fulfilment of his promise to the People, Lenin at once started negotiations for peace with Germany. There was much bitter discussion even amongst the Bolsheviks. The proposed German terms were too harsh, and after Trotsky's speeches at the first parley, much harsher. Many of the revolutionaries wanted to fight on, to give the German soldiers a chance to revolt for themselves. But the little man with the shrewd eyes saw further. When



the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was rushed on them by the Germans at forty-eight hours notice, there was no time to call together the Party Congress due to meet on the 6th, in time to ratify it. Lenin had to take the responsibility on his own shoulders. He signed it on the 3rd.

Many of the Bolsheviks could not believe it. When the news was telephoned through to Moscow, Anna Semyonovna flung on her overcoat and thrusting stockingless legs into her felt boots, rushed through the snowy streets to the meeting where her Uncle Klim was speaking. Breathlessly she gasped out the news.



He started back in anger and made as if to strike her. His editorial leader in the *Social-Democrat* against the Treaty appeared next morning, it was too late to stop it. Later on, Anna Semyonovna gave it to the Museum of the Revolution . . . it had become an historical document. And two days later Uncle Klim had thought it out and understood Lenin's firm step. When the Congress met on the 6th the Treaty was ratified. At no time did the Bolsheviks decide on any action without the most thorough debate. Twenty-eight voted for the Treaty. Twelve against. A close shave, and Lenin had to plead strongly for support for this step. But he had the people behind him always, the workers, the soldiers, the sailors, and the vast mass of peasants.

Looking back now through the pattern of the years, Anna Semyonovna remembers the awful day of the 4th when she and her comrades sat all day long huddled in her room, silent, thinking the Revolution had been betrayed.

Never again did they have difficulty in comprehending. Through all the difficulties of N.E.P.<sup>1</sup> and after, she and her uncle were stalwart supporters of the Party line. When Trotsky broke away to the left they watched him go (as they had to watch many others go who could not keep in step when discipline demanded that they keep in step), with the feeling that he had already given to the Revolution all he had to give. That magnificent, tireless voice that no one having heard could ever forget, those superb gestures, they had had their place on the stage of the Russian drama, for there is much theatre in a revolution. But the real work only comes afterwards when you have to put together the fragments patiently, piece by piece, to work for years, without fanfares and without searchlights, slowly building in adverse conditions. And it was then that Trotsky, plotting in exile, battered

<sup>1</sup> N.E.P.=new economic policy.

his wounded vanity against the Revolution, seeking to destroy.

Anna Semyonovna understood all this very well, for her life was lived in the midst of so many famous revolutionary figures, so many handsome men and women leaders, so many stirring speakers. And she had learned not to judge by externals. Vladimir, pouring over his political economy, quiet, dull, reliable, disdaining heroics, stayed the course.

For three days Anna Semyonovna carried a rifle as a soldier in the Red Army. She enjoyed it as she enjoyed all experience, but she, too, knew that her real job was not heroics. And presently she was sent to the Front in a different and much more useful capacity.

Oranburg, alternately held by the Reds and seized by the Whites. Mid-winter. She was several months pregnant already. She was assigned to the Council of Peoples' Economy, organising the workers to take control over production so that they could administer their own industry. Here she worked for four months. Then the Whites returned, and the Reds had to evacuate Oranburg. The journey to Moscow took two weeks, travelling in a goods train heated by one small iron stove. The Whites, close behind, pressed in their rear. At one wayside station, Anna Semyonovna, who had got out to fetch water, almost missed the train. She had to leap across a sea of rails, one by one. No one noticed she was left behind. She ran as fast as she could alongside the moving train. There was no step to climb up on. She leaped for the hand-rail, missed it, seized the edge of the floor, and inch by inch dragged herself, panting, level with the wagon, until her comrades pulled her up as the train gathered speed.

Not a moment too soon. The Whites had already caught up and were opening fire on the train.

All through the Revolution and Civil War children were born

just the same, whatever the conditions were. Many of the women had their babies at the Front. And they struggled up and went on with their work again.

Quite normally, exactly on time, Anna Semyonovna bore her daughter, Ilyena Vladimirovna, in a nursing home in Moscow, a temporary nursing home, hastily installed in what had once been a nobleman's luxurious flat.

Uncle Klim, at the fullest powers of his fine intellect, was formulating the new Soviet laws. He found time to come and sit beside his favourite niece when she was in child-bed.

She and Vladimir were working together again. He was in charge of the Rationing Committee for the bread supply of Moscow. Times were strained and difficult. There was plenty of flour in the South, but the transport system was in chaos. The bread ration was a quarter of a pound of bread to each person, daily. To bring this from the country Vladimir needed thirteen wagons every day. Every evening Anna Semyonovna enquired of him anxiously :

“ How many wagons to-day, Vallodia ? ”

Sometimes there were nine or ten, sometimes only eight.

Through all the difficulties and the tremendous responsibilities they both shouldered every day, they grew to understand each other perfectly. They didn't need protestations of love, they knew love. They were living in a relationship so harmonious that words were often superfluous. At crowded meetings, before she set eyes on him, she knew instinctively when her husband entered the building.

Now she was working on the Committee rationing milk and linen to mothers with babies. Daily she dealt with long, exhausted queues. It was almost impossible for her to snatch the necessary minutes to go and feed her own baby daughter. The queues were

fretful. She could not get away. Her milk rose, hurt, overflowed.

How hard they all worked. They poured their energy unceasingly into their tasks. More and more energy, more and more. They were strong. They were young. Endlessly they gave themselves out.

"Don't give Lyenka artificial milk," she implored her mother. "I *will* come. I may be late, but I will come."

They were not easy days. Later, when she had to organise crèches in the factories and when she herself worked on problems of transport, she knew from her own experience the practical side of these things.

Two years after Ilyena was born, she gave birth to a son, Andrei Vladimirovitch. He was more difficult to rear and she only managed to feed him for six months. She was nervous and overworked, as they all were. Inflammation developed in her breasts. Once, in pain, she turned on Vladimir, and said he didn't love her or he couldn't go on with his work with such concentration while she suffered so much pain. But before he put his arms round her shoulders she knew it wasn't true.

They were both in Moscow in 1924 when the news came of Lenin's death. The strong, kindly hand that had led them all through so many troubles, was suddenly snatched away. Deep grief drew everyone close. Many workers joined the Party. For three days on end the workers remained in the factory where Anna Semyonovna was working, and she with them, stunned. At his bier she saw such pitiful weeping that she could hardly tear herself away. She clung to Vladimir and he sought refuge in her.

The paralysis passed. The workers roused themselves and went on. There was so much to do. Always so much to do. Their leader died in the N.E.P. period. He did not even see the beginning of so much he had made possible.



That same year Vladimir was ordered to Central Asia on political work in the national minorities. Anna Semyonovna asked for an appointment there, too, and was given responsible work in the same area. So they packed up a few books and clothes, took the two children and a German-speaking nurse along with them, and set off for Tashkent.

The next six years they lived as near a family life as their lives were ever to know. They frequently had to take long journeys in different directions on different work, but at least their headquarters were centralised.

Vladimir was very good with children. As she watched him telling them stories she saw again herself and Uncle Klim. The children were charming. They lived in a one-storey stone house, a commune of nine responsible Government workers all young and full of enthusiasm, each in turn taking on the management of the house. Every night at dinner, over pilaff and endless glasses of tea, they talked eagerly of their work, and discussed the problems to be tackled.

Anna Semyonovna undertook several different jobs, amongst the women of the national minorities. First she helped to organise the new tobacco plantations on a collective basis. Then she was put in charge of the fourteen silk mills which covered the four different regions—Turkmenia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan.

Now a young matron, with two children, she had to organise unbelievably backward women into groups of responsible workers.

Uzbekistan, in 1924, was a living page from feudal history. There was not a single factory anywhere. Each little town was

completely fortified. Each had its own ghetto for the Bokharrian Jews, grimly shut off by barriers from the rest of the city. Artisans working in guilds regulated the quality and prices of all the goods produced, the number of apprentices permitted each artisan, and so on.

Anna Semyonovna, buying cotton one day for the children's dresses, was indignantly shown the Guild mark stamped at regular intervals on the cloth, when she asked them to measure it. That night at dinner she was full of this practical illustration of mediæval management.



The other eight Commissars had equally exciting tales to tell, each of their own work. One of them, a teacher, produced the geography book used in the only school.

THE DISCOVERIES OF THE WORLD

In the Name of Allah the All-Merciful.

*Tashkent.*

*Manufacturing Company Emil Ztindel Ltd.*

*Moscow.*

Illustrated by naïve woodcuts this geography book described how the umbilicus of the earth was guarded by two giants and spoke of the practical features of Hindustani where, not merely had there been an invasion of the English, but also termites bigger than men, and in the Southern parts “flying dogs which you can often see.”

The next few years were to transform these countries unbelievably. It was not necessary for them to pass through every phase of industrial development before reaching socialism. From the remote past they leaped over the intervening stages. Before Anna Semyonovna returned to Moscow, telephones and aeroplanes were common, and the Uzbek poet, Kuraiev, was writing in perfect ghazals, the traditional verse form :

*What can be more beautiful than a factory ?*

*Where all are busy at work.*

*Full of young girls and boys*

*With men and women*

*From old to young all are joyous here.*

*They come and stand by the machines with open hearts.*



*A man by the name Party,  
Came to our folk and took our hands  
And we came to the door of the factory  
And now I the Jew of the Machal (ghetto)  
Am a worker.*

The filthy narrow streets, where two asses could not pass each other, the complete lack of hygiene, these things, backward as they were, did not move Anna Semyonovna so much as the wretched condition of the Uzbek women. She had been a free and independent personality all her life, conscious of her worth and proud in her work. What revolted her most was the depravity she found amongst the older Uzbek women, made so degenerate by the cramping life of the harem that they were barely human. Even when they went to work they wore their stinking black horsehair veils right to the very gates of the factory.

The traders' wives and the wives of artisans were the worst. Obscured for years from all eyes but their husband's in the tomb-like folds of the *paranchah*, they emerged like blinded beetles, stupefied and devitalised.

Married off at eight or nine years of age, they had no idea of love. They were expected to be reasonably expert in certain of the physical dexterities of sex. Apart from this (and even this was shared out unequally among the several wives of each husband) they did absolutely nothing. Their bodies, idle and used only to cosmetics and sensual indulgence, had completely degenerated. Their minds were empty and viscous like a dark swamp. They knew next to nothing about their own babies and, as their laws held women to be unclean, inferior beings, they were not even permitted to cook the family food. They spent hours and hours in the semi-darkness of their fetid seclusion, quarrelling idly

amongst themselves and painting and repainting their eyes and their lips and their long, useless finger-nails.

Where to begin to reach out to such sad material ?

When the Emir was still alive it was ordered that all people should bow their foreheads to the ground when he appeared, a precaution he had found it wise to take against an attack on his life. This did not prevent him from being assassinated later on by the liberal elements in his own Government.

Anna Semyonovna, when she first set eyes on the gorgeous tomb of Tamerlane in Samarkand, the mosques of solid gold and lapis-lazuli mosaic, surrounded by swarms of wretched mud hovels, thought of Egypt and the tombs of the Pharaohs and the groaning battalions of slaves. And yet Uzbekistan was the most cultured of the national minorities. The Uzbeks cultivated well and the marvellous irrigations from the time of Alexander of Macedonia were still working perfectly.

But nowhere did she find women in such distressed bondage. She had more success with the younger women. They took eagerly to freedom, bared their faces to the sunshine, joined in collective work intelligently and helped her to organise the crèches and dining-rooms in the silk mills.

Although Anna Semyonovna met no active opposition in her work, many of the other Communists did. For no women had to fight more bitterly than the Uzbek women for the right to love, to live and to work like human beings. The middle-class opposition was fanatical and ruthless. There were women who, as punishment for having taken off the foul veil, were spitted through wooden stakes, soaked in kerosene and publicly set alight.

Irina, though she qualified as a doctor, never practised medicine. Determined on wealth and position, she had almost married the most eligible bachelor in Warsaw but finding the opposition of his parents too strong, she finally married a wealthy Polish barrister, a bitter anti-Bolshevik. She had a beautiful home, the fine clothes and jewels and the extravagant social life she had craved.

She had no children and lavished her affection on three pet Borzois. She missed her family, however, and vainly sought news through Papa, who was stumbling, bewildered, through the revolutionary years without understanding in the least what it was all about.



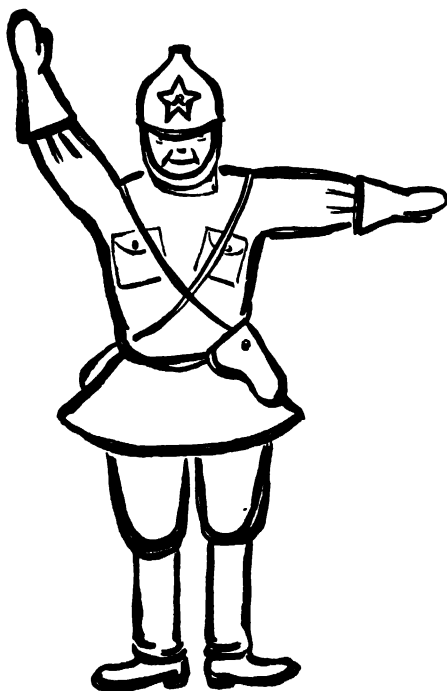
Six months in hot, unhealthy Turkmenia, with the endless desert of Kara-Kum stretching in all directions, and then to the Pamirs.

Tajikistan was centuries behind Uzbekistan. Anna Semyonovna thought she was living in the Bible itself, in the very childhood of the human race. This tiny population was scattered in the highest Pamir mountains, where no wheeled vehicle had yet been seen. In the summer the natives used a rough wooden sledge drawn by buffaloes; in the winter they stayed immobile in their villages. There was not even soil there on the rocks where they lived. Laboriously they carried up the rich loam from the valleys below. It was very fertile, and so, with a little scratching, they grew just enough green corn to keep them alive.

There were no bridges at all in these regions criss-crossed by fast-flowing mountain streams. The Tajiks used the precarious method of floating bladders downstream on which they tried

usually to land a loose plank of wood. Sometimes they got across the stream, sometimes they got drowned.

The borders of Tajikistan touch upon China and upon Afghanistan. Not so long ago there were some poor native Tajiks who used to pay yearly tribute to a strange, powerful god from Afghanistan. His name was Aga Khan. Not all of those who paid tribute had actually seen the strange god from the other side of the snow-covered mountains, but there were some who swore that they had seen him. He ruled the sun and the stars, they said. He rode on snorting dragons and when he spoke the earth trembled and withered. He had appeared once before them in



awful glory, he had turned a little stick in his holy hand and lo, water had gushed out from nowhere. It was wise to give tribute to so powerful a god.

When the first train came to Tajikistan, Anna Semyonovna was there with the delegation that came to greet it. Kalinin was there and Uncle Klim and Aunt Lisa, on this train that had come all the way from Moscow to bring greetings to the newly-formed National Republics.

An old Tajik peasant, his face transformed by wild ecstasy, rushed under the wheels as the train drew in. When they saw him afterwards in the hospital, he spoke to them of what he had seen in wonderful phrases out of the *Arabian Nights*. He had wished to go to salaam the giant who was pulling the chariot, the giant inside the large box whose breath escaped from his nostrils in great puffs.

Kazakstan was a nomad community, a stage higher than Tajikistan, yet not so developed as Uzbekistan. The Kazaks were wanderers, moving over the countryside with their vast herds of sheep, thousand upon thousand, streaming like a river over the plains in search of new pastures, spreading over the mountains during the summer, flooding the valleys (in the teeth of Kulak opposition) during the winter. The Kazaks grew nothing for themselves. When they required bread, they exchanged meat for flour. They were magnificent horsemen. Men, women and children, they lived and died on horseback, their only homes temporary tents, quickly struck when they moved onwards.

Anna Semyonovna loved the fearless Kazak women, always in the open air, always in the saddle, bridle in one hand, child in the other, suckling their babies as they rode, heads erect, beside their husbands. She found them brave and truthful and got along very well in all her dealings with them.

When the Kazaks were given back their own fertile valleys

(from which the rich peasants had long excluded them) they could not at first settle down in houses. They used to tether their horses in the new houses with their fodder and, pitching their tents as they had always done, sleep outside in the courtyard themselves. Presently they began to cultivate their rich land, to make the earth yield green corn, cotton, silk.

\* \* \* \* \*

Leaving Vladimir and the children in Tashkent Anna Semyonovna returned to Moscow in 1930 to take up a completely different job. Technical skill in the factories was very low. A wave of venomous white-guard wrecking was attacking the new industries and sabotaging agriculture. Under the slogan:

“ OUT OF THE OFFICES ! INTO THE FACTORIES ! ”

she and hundreds of other Communists were sent out to improve technique.

For nine months she worked in Bolshevistka, a trouser factory in Moscow, drawing the minimum pay. The factory was then producing a thousand pairs of trousers every day of seven hours work. The necessity for bigger output was responsible for much scamped work. Anna Semyonovna as usual a little ahead of her time, made a strong agitation for better work even at the expense of less output. Although she was more accustomed to working with her brains than her fingers, she rapidly became very nimble. Her production level soared, and her neighbours, spurred on by the rising pile of her work, made increasing efforts to overtake her.

At the same time Anna Semyonovna studied the difficulties and needs of the workers in the plant and reported to the Party nucleus of the factory.

She was too accustomed to work to enjoy idleness even in between jobs, so she volunteered after this to organise a summer kindergarten in Moscow for destitute children, orphans of the Revolution and Civil War. She made acquaintance with the material the future was to be built on, the material Uncle Klim was so interested in, and found it tough and unsentimental, independent and with a strong taste for the heroic.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gentle Aunt Lisa was infirm now. Her rheumatic fingers could no longer play the piano. Mother was ageing. Anna Semyonovna couldn't understand why her mother had become so unsure of herself, why she called conferences of all the aunts when there was the smallest decision to be taken. It made Anna Semyonovna impatient. She thought it better to make a wrong decision, even, than to stand feebly first on this foot then on that.

Again she was living with Uncle Klim. They shared a flat in Moscow. Life was regulated like a clock. At 6.30 every morning she rose, took her bath, and at seven studied English for two hours. At eight precisely Uncle Klim's masseur arrived. At nine they ate breakfast. At nine-thirty the State car arrived to take them both to work. At five she returned to supper, took a chemistry lesson or a woodwork lesson, or went to the Planetarium. At eleven they drank tea. Before midnight she read herself to sleep. Uncle Klim worked on at his big desk until two or three in the morning.

Books, constant meetings and talk. Uncle Klim was a fine speaker, vivid and original, with a sharp streak of ironic humour. They enjoyed their debates, sifting each other's thoughts, sparring for weak spots in each other's arguments, mercilessly seizing upon any illogical point.

Uncle Klim was broader and stockier. He was toughening like an

Never had his brilliant mind functioned so well as now. He worked steadily, eighteen or twenty hours every day, at whatever was put before him without noticing what, was always in perfect health.

Transport was the pressing problem. Anna Semyonovna was delighted to be drafted into this work. Kaganovitch appointed her director of the forty saw-mills supplying the sleepers for the State Railways. She flung herself into her new work with enthusiasm. She already knew how to direct men and women, how to organise new factories, how to buy machinery and equip new undertakings. But so far she knew nothing about railways.

This deficiency she set to work to overcome. Professors of Chemistry and specialists in wood came regularly to the flat to instruct her. She took her examinations at a gallop and was pleased as a schoolgirl to get full marks.

When she took over the directorship of the saw-mills, they were antiquated and badly organised, producing only 37·4 cubic metres of wood every seven-hour shift. For five years she struggled to get the production up to 57 cubic metres, and from that reach out in the future to 62.

To keep in touch with her forty saw-mills Anna Semyonovna frequently made long journeys to the far north and the east, to Archangel, Kazan, Vladivostock, Stalingrad. She travelled in a blue suit, eight years old, carrying a tiny gladstone bag which contained her nightdress, her toothbrush and her papers.

Engineers from the big plants came to consult with her from the remote corners of Russia, stayed a night or two, sleeping on the divan in the dining-room.

She now wore the trim uniform of the railway employees, with the metal insignia on the velvet tab of the collar, above the two red stars of her status. It became her. She had never cared for



embroideries nor lace, like Irina. She loved good simple lines and clear bright colours.

At breakfast, sometimes, Uncle Klim teased her for her passion to acquire what he called "inhuman knowledge," but she was not to be put off. *He* wanted to know what kind of people she was working with, what they thought about, dreamed of, loved and hated, what their problems were. Often he brought his criminal clients to the flat and more than once a murderer slept on the divan in the dining-room.

Life was very full, but no longer hectic as in the old days. The children were beginning to write her letters on carefully ruled



paper. She kept them all in her treasure corner, with a few precious snapshots, fading invitations to early Party Congresses and one or two specially favourite books.

The children were both at school in the country. Vladimir was hard at work on his new job in the co-operatives. They hardly saw each other. Sometimes, however, they took their summer vacation together in the Caucasus with Uncle Klim, walking, swimming, basking in the sun. Uncle Klim was too used to the halter not to pine for Moscow after a week's leisure. Anna Semyonovna, who was a strong tireless swimmer, spent hours on end in the Black Sea.

She took a great pile of books away with her every summer, which she devoured on the hot sands when she wasn't actually in the water. Except for Heine whom she had loved from childhood, she had no taste at all for poetry. Her taste in books was clearly defined. She liked Utopian romances, especially the early Wells, had a soft spot for Hans Andersen and the *Arabian Nights*, was bored with the heroics of untalented modern writers. She found her chief delight in scientific books. Her French and German were unruined and it was the chance discovery of Jeans' *Astronomy* which had prompted her to re-learn English. Her library had grown slowly. She had tended it with jealous care, like a good gardener. Books were the only thing of which she was ever covetous.

Uncle Klim said she had a *left deviation*, thinking in the far future as she tended to do. She knew it was true, yet she argued it out with him for the pleasure of arguing with him. He said it was because she had never known actual want or insecurity. She had always been buoyed up by love and surrounded by reliable friends. She had never been unwanted, never idle, never without something to eat. He observed that all the left deviators ran because

they had never had to learn to walk. The shrewd old man worked constantly amongst criminals and homeless children and he knew the value of hard realism.

They didn't always talk. Often at mealtimes they ate in silence, each reading his own book. One morning Uncle Klim, eating his omelette slowly and methodically as usual, suddenly remarked, in perfect English:

*"Should you ask me whence these stories  
Whence these legends and traditions  
With the odours of the forests,  
With the dew and damp of meadows,  
With the curling smoke of wigwams,  
With the rushing of great rivers,  
With their frequent . . ."*

The rest was gone, but this morsel of *Hiawatha*, floating through his memory from prison days, suggested an agreeable undertaking to Anna Semyonovna, who had stumbled on Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, and had been waiting for a favourable moment to tell Uncle all about it. They decided, on the spot, to translate it into Russian. Uncle had forgotten practically all his English, but his literary style was much better than hers. They started it that same evening.

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They moved to a flat in Government House on Kamerny Most. Uncle Klim, Anna Semyonovna and Vladimir each had a room, and there was a common dining-room, with a divan to put up a guest. There was a room for the housekeeper and a room for the children when they came home from school.

The flat was furnished with Spartan simplicity as to decoration, but extreme comfort otherwise. Anna Semyonovna, though she liked to sit soft, loathed rugs and tapestries, after her experience of the filth of Central Asia. Treacherously useless ornament, akin to the peculiar preoccupation with dirt and wretchedness she had observed in the latest *left* novels which came from Europe. Her mind was too well-balanced to be moved by their reiterated gamut of woe. Such literature, she considered, was merely an exotic indulgence. What had it to do with the rising struggle of the workers? No battle-cry to fight for deliverance from oppression, these morbid recountings of despair, but the cry of the vanquished, vanquished before the battle had even begun. They irritated her.

Two glassed-in bookcases held her fine editions, the darlings of her life. Bookshelves lined every room, each section arranged in exquisite order. A few photographs of revolutionary groups, a photograph of Stalin, one of Lenin, green plants at every window.

Uncle Klim was given the biggest room, though he hardly noticed anything but his desk and his papers. His leather briefcase was always bulged with documents so much so that the two lower clasps of the fastening had never been used at all in twenty years service.

Aunt Lisa was dead now. And her piano stood silent in the dining-room. Anna Semyonovna wondered if either of her children would ever want to study music. They were so thrilled about engineering, chemistry, parachute-jumping, though they went regularly to the big concerts at the Conservatoire and loved the ballet at the Bolshoi.

Their new housekeeper was named Anna Alexandrovna. She was an illiterate, plump, good-natured middle peasant of fifty-five. She knew very little of what went on in the world, and cared for

nothing but the cleanliness and order of the flat, and the peace of her employers. She was melting into a rosy old age with hardly a wrinkle on her clear brow. She wore soft print dresses, felt slippers, and a pair of green stone ear-rings that she had bought on Ochotni Ryad for five roubles many years ago when a rouble was a rouble. She didn't consider paper roubles money at all.

There was little work to do in her new job. She kept the shining flat spotlessly clean, which wasn't difficult, starched Anna Semyonovna's white linen collars and plain muslin blouses, went to the local factory kitchen to fetch the simple evening meal, spoilt the children when they came home on holiday, and scolded Uncle Klim for working too late at night and going out without his overcoat. In between she sat happily in her beautiful kitchen, gossiping with the neighbours.

Anna Alexandrovna had never missed the books she had not been able to read and regarded the big library as so much furniture to be dusted every morning. Anna Semyonovna painstakingly taught her the numbers up to nine so that she might use the automatic telephone. When the postwoman brought the morning's letters Anna Alexandrovna sorted them out according to the number of stamps. Uncle Klim, being the most important, was regularly given those letters with the most stamps, no matter what the name might be on the envelope. She thought Anna Semyonovna worked too hard, and was greatly perturbed when she took up astronomy and spent her rare spare evenings at the Planetarium.

Anna Semyonovna enjoyed the peasant speech of the other Anna, the pleasant voice speaking in spontaneous rhymes as children do. Often they ate supper together in the kitchen and Anna Alexandrovna, over the soup, related to her long anecdotes in this manner:

DM

*"One fine evening, Anna Semyonovna, God bless you, TRUTH was taking a bit of a walk along Ochotni Ryad. TRUTH was poor, all in rags, thin and miserable as a straw she was, when who should she meet but FALSEHOOD himself, prosperous, well-dressed and fat as the village priest. And so FALSEHOOD said :*

*" ' Truth, God bless you,' says he,*

*" ' You come along with me, I'll give you a good dinner.'"*

*"And so TRUTH goes along with FALSEHOOD to a big restaurant on Tverskaya. They sit themselves down and FALSEHOOD claps his hands for the waiter and orders a fine dinner. Borsht, they have, and cutlets and goose and kasha and gravy, and plenty of wine to wash it down they had too. And so they eat and drink and eat and drink.*

*"When they have stuffed themselves so that they can neither eat nor drink any more, the waiter leaves the bill on the table. And so FALSEHOOD calls the waiter back, and says in a loud voice :*

*" ' Waiter, where's the change from those hundred roubles I gave you ?' "*

*"The waiter trembles all over like a newly-born calf, and swears that FALSEHOOD hasn't given him any money.*

*"And so FALSEHOOD raises a howl like the devil with a scalded behind and makes a big scandal, till the manager of the restaurant comes running up.*

*" ' FALSEHOOD, your honour, God bless you, what's the matter ?' says the manager, rubbing his hands one against the other.*

*"FALSEHOOD shouts at the top of his voice :*

*" ' I gave the waiter a hundred roubles to pay the bill, God punish me if I'm not telling the truth, and he's stolen the change.' "*

*" ' Your Honour, God bless you,' cries the waiter, frightened like a maiden at the first touch of a man. ' He never gave me any money at all. Thunder strike me in this very spot, if I'm not telling the truth.*

*Not a kopeck did he give me, your Honour ! ’*

*“ And so the manager beats the waiter very hard and throws him on to the floor.*

*“ ‘ Aï aï,’ howls the waiter, sitting on the floor holding his cracked poll. ‘ Where shall I find Truth in this wicked City ? ’*

*“ But Truth, Anna Semyonovna, God bless you, sat there at the table, stuffed with food and wine like a goose-feather mattress, and didn’t say a word.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

Uncle Klim was more than sixty when he visited the Baltic White Sea Canal construction and came back transfigured by what he had seen and felt. But he was getting old. In the last two years he had become an old man. His black crested hair was a white mist now, his brooding beautiful eyes heavy and pouched. He still worked an eighteen-hour day, but something was going from him. He was never ill, but he began to be a little tired sometimes, though he didn’t realise he was tired because he had never been tired before. He became a little melancholy.

One day Anna Semyonovna noticed a streak of white in her black hair and several wrinkles round her eyes and mouth. It was a shock to realise she was over forty already.

She found the approach of age intolerable. That her beauty faded was of less concern to her than that she felt her sharp-edged mind less able to tackle the manifold problems she had to cope with every day. She noticed herself, to her horror, beginning to become indecisive. She was more than able to deal with her forty saw-mills, and decided, since she was too used to the routine of the work, to ask the Party to give her another job where she could start learning something new. She knew all about the chemical

properties of wood. She wanted to learn about an artificial material . . . vulcanite perhaps.

It was Stakhanov Week on the railways.

"How many car-loadings to-day, Niouta?" Vladimir enquired anxiously of her every morning. 90,000 . . . 93,000 . . . even up to 98,500. They exchanged an amused glance. She knew what he was thinking of; the days when there had been nine wagons, ten wagons, sometimes only eight wagons.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Anna Semyonovna has influenza. She must stay in bed for three days. Uncle Klim comes to sit beside her bed. He has never been ill for a day in his life. He can't understand how or why people get ill. Anna Semyonovna, her head tied in a snowy linen kerchief, cuddles herself luxuriously into the sweet-smelling linen sheets. She has twenty books to read, two engineers have come from Kazan and are on their way to see her now, and Genia, one of Uncle's ex-criminal protégés, has rung up to say he is coming to pay a visit.

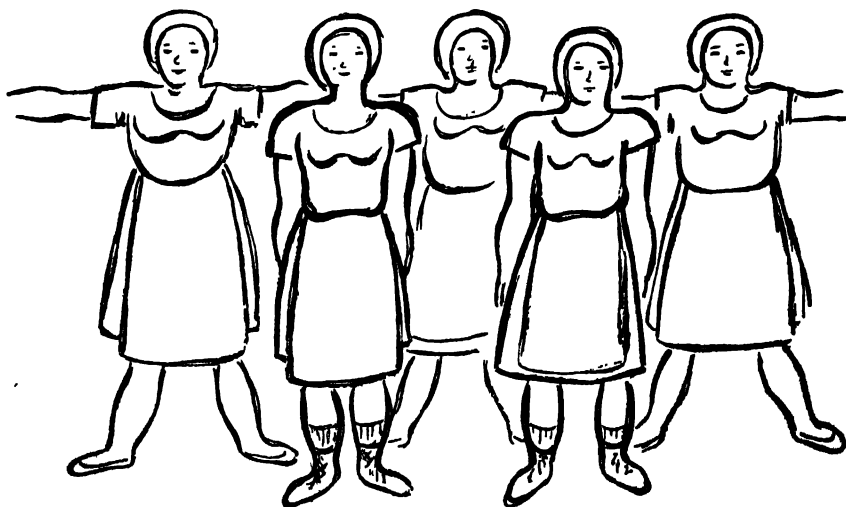
It is deep mid-winter. The snow is piled on the window-ledge. No flowers, not even mimosa from the sunny Caucasus. It is still months too soon for the heavy white snow to melt, for the first sharply sweet spring days, for the ice to come floating down the swollen turgid Moscow river.

Anna Semyonovna reads and dozes, plays a game of patience with herself, thinks dreamily. . . . Russia now was so much to the young, and it was right that it should be so. She wanted to put all that her life had given her into the hands of her children and all



other children. They must go on from where she and Vladimir left off, and that was already ahead of other people. Having taken to learning as people take to alcohol she knew a good bit, more than a good bit, for all her knowledge was inter-related and made a unity. She wished she could give out to her children what she knew. But it wasn't any use. She thought too far ahead for them; they preferred Vladimir's lessons better. He spoke their own language.

Yet there were some things she must tell her daughter. Lyenka, fifteen already, breasts beginning to swell. . . . She knew Lyenka would be the decisive one now in the household, for she was beginning to get uncertain herself, as her mother had done. The more you know, the more difficulty to decide. Experience adds so much to both sides of every question.



First of all, Anna Semyonovna decided, she would tell Lyenka the importance of being absolutely truthful, not for the sake of morality, but for one's own peace of mind. Truthful in the smallest matters as well as the big things. No little white lies. Only the absolute truth. Secondly, and it was the same instinct as the first really, not to be afraid of any impulses, not even the cheap and base ones. Let them out. Don't hide them. Don't smother them. Don't be afraid of anything in your mind or body. There are many dark corners in the recesses of the human mind, and they are part of the human inheritance and must be understood and used too. Only fear, only shame is disgusting. . . .

She looks round her room as though for the first time. It is still a student's room. Shelves of books everywhere. A special shelf for her favourites: Jeans' *Astronomy*, Smollett, Heine, *The Thousand and One Nights*, Lenin's *Left Wing Communism*, *An Infantile Disorder*. Pinned on the wall beside the magnificent polished wood bed (her Mother's that had been a hundred years in the family) is a towel embroidered in faded blue stitches. Aunt Lisa made it when she was a child. It says BONJOUR over five blue love-birds sitting on a blue branch. Mother's cross-stitch wedding towels show through the glass doors of the big wooden wardrobe. Above her bed a carefully framed faded photograph . . . handsome Papa, Uncle Klim, young, slender, earnest again, Mother, Irina a dumpling of four, sitting in her broad lap; herself, a pretty girl of five holding a basket of flowers. . . . Where had this photograph not been? Uncle had taken it with him into prison and exile. It had travelled as far as he had. It was no less faded now.

Was she afraid of death? Was it vanity? She looked candidly into the deepest corners of her mind, as she had always done, and turned out her deepest thoughts. No, she wasn't afraid of death. She might die to-morrow without terror. She had enjoyed her life



... She had opened herself wide and given back to life what she had to give. Her body had been her able servant and her mind had gathered endless riches for her. She had known love as few women know love and she had borne a son and a daughter.

Vanity? Was it terrible to lose the firm contours of youth? Yes, there was vanity. She knew her face was not ageing with the vacuity of women whose lives have been an empty pursuit of personal indulgence. She was proud of the service in which her hair was whitening. She had looked closely into the crumpled, furrowed face of old Uncle Klim and saw its profundity was beautiful compared to the passive face of Papa, well over seventy now, an astonishingly handsome old man, who wandered about the kitchen in his blue roubashka like a character out of Tolstoy . . . seeking refuge with Anna Alexandrovna from the disturbingly difficult talk of his daughter and his brother-in-law.

She had known such physical fulfilment with Vladimir that she was reluctant for the years to decrease their yield. She regretted sharply the gradual dulling of her fine mind. There was still so much she wanted to study, so many books she had not yet read, so many sciences she had not had time to glimpse.

The same old friends from forty years back who dropped in to see them on rest-days—they were all ageing rapidly, shrivelling, becoming grey and bowed—these brave hearts and sturdy bodies of the old days. They spoke little now as they sat together in the quiet of the evening. Some had died, their blood pouring itself away on the cobbles of the Revolution; some had been killed in the Civil War and after. The rest clung together, fulfilled in the new youth of Russia, but a little sad with the bitter of age.

She felt what she was most sad about was that she would never know the marvels that were beginning to enfold for people, now they were freeing themselves visibly from the bondage of the past.

She thought constantly of the coming days when communication would be infinitely swifter, when man would reach out to other planets, when the secrets of the stars would be unlocked. In time to come surely man would be able to live a longer span. Sixty or seventy years is so short a time to learn much, to love much, to begin to understand the universe.

And she decided that she was greedy. Because her life had been so rich and full she was reluctant to miss the future. If she could live to be one hundred, perhaps, and retain her clear mind and youthful vigour, would she then have time enough to work and study as much as she wanted?

She thought that in the future all the doctors in the world would work together in co-operation to solve the problem of age so that man's life might be prolonged at its prime. Not for the sake of the ageing coquettes desperate at the thought of losing what they never had, but so that people would have time enough to learn to know the world and the peoples of the world, the manifold things that they make and think, and, in the far future perhaps, to know other worlds than this, and . . .

Genia rings. Anna Alexandrovna, beaming with delight all over her pink face, bustles to the door to let him in.

He is bursting to tell them all about his new job. Anna Semyonovna questions him about the factory restaurant. Yes, it is very good. They have cutlets and kasha, salads, compôte . . . as much as you can eat. He has subscription tickets to the Kamerny Theatre for three months. And he is earning 350 roubles a month, sometimes as much as 450 roubles.

He plunges his muscular hand into his bosom and draws out something wrapped in a cloth. His eyes shine with pride. He uncovers a gauge.

"It measures widths as fine as a hair, Anna Semyonovna," he

says with a deep breath. "It is mine. I use it."

Uncle Klim gives him an affectionate punch in the ribs. He has to go to a meeting. He is gone.

"He has gone out without his overcoat again!" shouts Anna Semyonovna, sitting up in bed in agitation.

"Anna Alexandrovna, run quickly. Run after him!"

The old woman runs after him to the door, and Genia runs after her with the overcoat.

It is too late. Uncle is down the stairs and already out, half-way across the courtyard. They can see the stocky figure in the snow, moving at a great pace towards the iron gates.

Anna Alexandrovna, still panting, brings in the tray with tea, and glass saucers for jam. She beams upon them, shutting her eyes ecstatically and shaking her head until the green ear-rings flash in the light.

"Drink, my darlings," she scolds, "Drink."

*Yura Abramovitch*









## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

YURA ABRAMOVITCH	.	a Jewish engineer
MOROSOV . . . .	.	an intellectual
ELIZAVETTA VASSILIEVNA		doctor, wife of Andrei Victor- ovitch
ANDREI VICTOROVITCH	.	doctor in the Red Army
KLAVDIA KARLOVNA	.	Yura's wife
VILYE . . . .	.	Yura's son
JOAN . . . .	.	the daughter of his landlady
GALLINA . . . .	.	a child on the boat
SUSENKO . . . .	.	Captain of the <i>Smolny</i>
VLADIMIR ILYITCH .	.	Lenin



## *Yura Abramovitch*

**Y**URI WAS NO BEAUTY from the start. He was born in Kiev in 1901 in the middle of a swarming family of wretchedly poor Jews. He was undersized, top-heavy and left-handed. His father, an exhausted, pious man, slaved day and night at the local confectioner's, squeezing ornamental sugar whirls on to cheap cakes.

None of the horde of children had a chance to learn to read or write. They lived in misery and were thankful if they got a bite of bread to keep their bellies quiet.

Yuri broke away from this famished household at an early age, to plague the streets of Kiev with gangs of hooligan children belched out by the slums. Before he was ten, however, he had got himself into an electrical factory. He wanted desperately to learn some sort of trade. In order to achieve this end he endured all the blows and insults of the foreman, in addition to the brutalities of his master. He picked up very little, however. The few kopecks he earned did not suffice to buy him either food or shelter. He ate anything he could get hold of, slept in old warehouses when it rained, and dozed on the open streets in the warm summer nights.

His greatest pleasure was to get a mouthful of vodka into him when some generous hooligan would spare him a gulp from his stolen bottle.

Yuri didn't change much in his appearance. He remained ugly. He grew short and square and immensely strong in the shoulders. He had small slit eyes, pulled up at the outer corners like a Chinaman, under queer arched eyebrows. His nose was undeveloped and his lower lip was all on one side. His mouth pouted like a fish. His one good feature was his well-cut chin.

Yuri wanted to know a lot of things. It was his policy to take everything in and look blank; he had a hoarse voice which he rarely used.

For fifteen years he pushed his way through life in the deepest puzzlement, without the least idea what it was all about, being entirely concerned with the constant necessity of getting some food into his stomach every day and learning a trade.

Russia was at war. It meant nothing to Yuri. And the 1917 Revolution might have meant just as little if he had not stumbled across Morosov.

Morosov was his first intellectual. Morosov was his first glimpse of culture. Morosov could read and write. He worked in an office and was a Social-Democrat. He had read many novels and political books, and it was he who first explained the world to Yuri in terms of the class-struggle, and introduced to Yuri the important word Marxism.

Yuri listened with both his ears. This Marxism sounded to him like a good thing. He understood Morosov to favour a state of affairs where ordinary illiterate devils like Yuri got a chance to read and write and eat enough and work the factories themselves. That was good enough for Yuri. So that when the Revolution came Yuri enlisted right away in the Red Army, to put his muscular

shoulders behind the people who were out to achieve these desirable things for such as he.

In the Red Army he was given a winter cloth helmet, good leather boots and a long warm greatcoat down to his feet. Also he was taught to read and write.

Yuri drank in learning more avidly than he had ever gulped down vodka. He joined the Party, attended political classes and got on rapidly with his education. Before he was eighteen he was already a Commissar.

There were many fronts to the Civil War. Yuri fought on all of them. Commanders found this dogged fellow much better than they thought. He was very shrewd, for all he pretended to look so stupid. He could be trusted to do whatever he was bid no matter what obstacles he encountered, and you could have hacked him to pieces before he would break Party discipline.

Yuri did his work with all his heart, and the greatest pleasure of his life was to look as smart as possible. He was exceedingly vain of his army uniform. He polished his accoutrements till the straps glowed, and he burnished his leather top-boots until he could see his ugly face in them.

Frequently on Party duty he was sent on long journeys on horseback over the disordered country, often with another comrade, a woman as likely as a man. He was accustomed to such arrangements and never thought twice about it. Women as such, never entered his thoughts.

He found himself much quicker-witted than the big fellows, and much better with his pudgy left hand than most of his taller friends with their right. He had a profound belief in the virtue of smallness. He remembered the proverb "*big and silly*." He considered the great men who had been tiny, Napoleon and Marat, and his great hero, Vladimir Ilyitch. He began to carry, besides his

5 revolver, a spitting automatic, only about four inches long; this he hid in his armpit in case of emergency. It was the smallest size he could get.

\* \* \* \* \*

Spring. Yuri was Commissar for a column in the Ukraine. Things were quiet. The quickening green life around him struggled through the disorder and chaos of the fighting. Yuri polished his leather equipment very carefully every day. He was vain of his uniform.

With the unfolding young leaves his thoughts turned towards the books he had not known, the theatres he had been denied. Would the Civil War ever end? There was war stretching behind him, and around him and in front of him, and with soldier's psychology he thought it would go on for ever. Certainly until the Reds conquered, there would be war and war. And he, Yuri Abramovitch, would be dispatched swift as the bow compels the arrow, to this place and to that place. And he would go. He would use all his cunning, his knowledge and his strength to do what was needed. And he would do this because he had been ignorant and hungry all his life, as all his class had been ignorant and hungry, and this fighting was the only way out.

There were splendid moments in this war, too, sometimes . . . when they entered a village after the fighting was over, led by music, with their red banner flying proudly before them . . . when they sat round the camp fire in the long evenings, singing and singing and telling stories . . . when those comrades who were educated turned out their minds and shared the wonderful harvest with their mates. Those were good moments. And, in between, the excitements, the dirt of the war, comradeships, Party orders.

The army doctor was a fine comrade. So was the doctor's wife.



Yuri often went to their wooden shack to talk with them in the evenings after his day's work. Elizavetta Vassilievna was a cultured woman. She had read many books and seen many plays in the theatres of St. Petersburg. These things were dear to Yuri. He lapped up knowledge as a thirsty pup laps up water.

Elizavetta used to walk over to Yuri's wooden room some evenings when he had too much work to do to come over himself. She had a soft spot for this ugly boy in the immaculate uniform who bowed to her judgment in everything except politics. There he was clear and authoritative. He analysed each situation carefully, made up his mind, then acted as decisively as a steel trap.

Denikin was planning an attack. Scouts had been captured and there had been intermittent sniping for some days. It was a moonless stormy night when Elizavetta came in as usual to talk with him. She was blown through his door by a sudden howl of wind, and struggled to fasten it behind her. She had brought a book with her, *Dostoevsky*, and she sat late this night, her head resting on her cupped hands, the rain clinging to her hair in little drops, telling him about her childhood in St. Petersburg before the Revolution. She and her husband, Andrei Victorovitch, had been Social-Democrats then. They had followed Kerensky until the Civil War itself had cleared the track for them.

Yuri listened eagerly. She brought a different world before his eyes; a clean quiet household with enough beds and regular food to eat, a household where the children were taken to the dentist when they had a toothache, where there was a governess who spoke French and German, where there was music every day of their lives, and books to read and time to study.

Elizavetta Vassilievna talked and talked in her slow, rather sad voice. She caught Yuri's slit eyes fixed earnestly on her face, and stopped abruptly, half-way through a sentence. She hadn't been

thinking of what she was saying. It was very late. She said she was tired. She looked through the dirty glass window, where the rain slashed the intense darkness, and shivered.

Yuri thought she was afraid to go back.

"Come, Comrade Elizavetta, I'll take you to your quarters," he said in a matter-of-fact voice.

"No."

"My orderly shall accompany us, if you like, Elizavetta Vassilievna," he added.

Elizavetta shook her head impatiently.

"I'm not afraid," she said in a weary voice. "I am only very tired."

Yuri's conscience smote him. She had done a hard day's work in the wooden structure that served as a hospital, and he had kept her talking half the night. She was only a woman. He knew women were not so strong as men. He begged her to take his camp bed. She flung herself on it and closed her eyes. Yuri stretched himself out on the wooden bench, carefully folding his immaculate greatcoat beneath him, and hanging his leather equipment over the table.

"Sleeping, Comrade Elizavetta?" he asked gently.

No answer.

He blew out the morsel of candle and curled himself up like a hedgehog, head under his short arm, on the bench.

An hour passed. His mind, emptied of thought, was blissfully relaxing into sleep, when he heard rustling from the other side of the room. He started up.

"Yura Abramovitch, are you sleeping?"

"What's the matter?"

"Comrade Yuri, it is not right that you should lose your night's sleep like this. To-morrow you will need a clear head for your

work. Come, take this bed. I shall go back."

"Nu . . . I'm comfortable."

"Then permit me to share it with you."

Yuri, half-asleep, scratched his head in irritation. Slowly he uncurled his short length from the wooden bench and made towards the camp bed.

"I assure you it is not necessary, Elizavetta Vassilievna. I am strong. I have been without sleep for many nights and worked just as well afterwards."

"Nevertheless, Comrade Commissar, I am your doctor. You must obey me."

They both laughed.



Yuri threw himself on the narrow bed, wrapping his greatcoat over them both, and snuggled himself under its warm folds.

"You're a good Comrade, Elizavetta Vassilievna," he said earnestly, after long thought. . . . "I used to think I could never become friendly with a bourgeois. I only wanted to talk with you at first because you knew all about books and theatres. Now I believe you and Comrade Andrei, your husband, understand what we workers are fighting for. Or you could not fight beside us as you do."

She did not reply.

Yuri scratched his head with satisfaction and fell asleep instantly.

A hot hand touched his elbow. He awoke. With an effort he remembered where he was. He could see nothing. He put out his hand in the intense darkness and touched a warm breast. Elizavetta giggled. The rain was still beating against the window.

"What's the matter, Elizavetta Vassilievna? Are you ill? Are you frightened? . . . It's all right. Everything's quiet. What is it?"

"Nothing," she said in a whisper . . . "Only, I can't sleep."

She moved nearer him. Her hands slid to his shoulder. She came in contact with the automatic under his shirt, drew in her breath sharply, and broke into laughter. She was in his arms.

Yuri was nonplussed. It took him a long time to understand what she was getting at. Then he was dumbfounded. She was his first woman.

The next day Yuri felt badly. Doctor Andrei was his friend and comrade. Elizavetta Vassilievna had been his good comrade. Now it was all different. And he had no idea that she was like that. He had shared a rough peasant's bed more than once with girl comrades when there was only one bed available, on the long journeys across the steppes on Party orders, and they had never

behaved like that. They had fallen asleep as wearily and with a little primping as though they had been men.

Yuri was seriously disturbed. He didn't like it at all. Elizavetta Vassilievna had given him more than he had asked of her. It offended his young manhood that she, who belonged to another man, had taken something from him like this. His pride smarted.

He was that day ordered to another front, five hundred miles away, at Samara. He left abruptly, without saying good-bye either to Andrei or to Elizavetta Vassilievna. He was glad that he never met either of them again.

When this Civil War would be over he would look round and choose himself a wife. A serious dignified woman. They would have children and work together. None of these sensual episodes which did people no credit. He thought of his wrinkled old mother who had married at sixteen and borne ten children, and he was deeply shocked at the lightness of bourgeois women.

It was a pity. He had enjoyed her conversation. And he had enjoyed her. But it was not right. He was quite sure that it was not right. She had a husband and they lived together as man and wife. And there should be no other man. Perhaps she was not happy with her husband? Yuri could not understand why. Andrei was a strong, virile fellow. What had she done to Yuri that aroused his resentment like this?

She was bourgeois . . . well, so was Engels . . . a very big bourgeois . . . *some* of them were all right. But he had no use for loose women.

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In the long-drawn battle on the Polish front Yuri was wounded in the groin. By inches the bullet missed his genitals. He lay on the battlefield for two days and nights, soaked in blood, half-conscious. His thirst was terrifying. Towards nightfall on the

third day he saw soldiers approaching and rallied his swimming wits to decide what to do. His Party credentials. They must instantly be destroyed. If they were found on him he was finished. With shaking hands he groped feebly in his pockets for the documents. Not quick enough. Darkness closed over his eyes before he could seize them.

The Poles took him away with them. They had to carry him because he was unconscious, and they grumbled because their prisoner, five foot two only, was such a weight. Yuri was in splendid condition at this time. He weighed thirteen stone, and it was all solid muscle and bone.

He came to. A thin, sharp-eyed Polish intelligence officer was sitting at a table in a priest's tithe-barn, the largest building in the straggling village. Yuri's documents had already been taken from his pockets and his double belt, and lay in a neat pile on the table.

When he had been handed over as a prisoner they took off his shining boots and greedily seized what was left of his immaculate uniform. They had to tear away the shirt, stuck in the congealed blood of his wound. Yuri tightened his lips as the Polish soldiers cursed when the strong linen strained and would not come away.

Yuri refused doggedly to say a word until they gave him water to quench his parched gullet. The orderly was then ordered out of the room. The sharp-eyed intelligence officer, looking Yuri strangely in the eyes, singled out the precious Party credentials, and tore them to pieces. It was Yuri's first lesson in international politics. The Polish intelligence officer was also a Communist.

Yuri escaped the first night his guards were drunk. After his escape, being given leave to recuperate, he made his way, by slow stages, back to Kiev. He was overwhelmed by longing to see his mother again. Down the familiar dirty back street he went, now empty and silent. The narrow door was open. He threw back his

heavy shoulders and marched in. His mother's eyes widened in terror as she wheeled round and saw him, and she went over backwards in a swoon. She had thought him killed long ago.

He settled down at home, shared his ration of bread with the family, talked as little as usual. He grew rapidly strong again and one morning, with a brief farewell, was off.

Yuri felt he was lucky when he escaped the second time, from a prisoner's barbed-wire cage on the Eastern Front against Kolchak; but when, after returning to fight the Poles, he was caught for the third time, he knew it was all up.

The Whites drove him along with the butts of their rifles. They had a long way to take him and they were weary. Gradually Yuri, dragging his short legs, managed to fall a little behind the others. His cunning slit eyes narrowed. In a hoarse voice, playing for time, he offered his guard a large sum of money to let him slip away. The White soldier, ill-fed and ragged, refused. Yuri gabbled on rapidly, his Ukrainian accent harsher than usual. Anything to gain time. The White soldier, deciding that this prisoner must be rich and important, shifted his position to get a closer grip on his right arm. Instantly, with his left hand, Yuri whipped out the tiny automatic from his armpit, shot down the guard, and took to his heels.

Hiding in bushes, lying flat under sacks in peasant carts, moving by night and keeping dark during the day, he got back to his brigade in due course, and reported himself for further duty.

The Poles had taken possession of a village near by. Yuri changed his name to a Polish one and crawled back to do intelligence work. He stuck to this Polish name for the rest of his life. It had seen him through plenty and was to see him through plenty more.

The Civil War was over. The long slow fight for reconstruction had begun. Yuri was sent to study electrical engineering in Kharkov.

He was learning to be an electrical engineer because electrical engineers were needed to build new Russia. If the Party had demanded of him to master astronomy or bee-keeping, if they had ordered him to dig for gold in Siberia, he would have tackled the job just the same, slowly, and with granite determination to complete the task no matter what obstacles barred his path.

He worked doggedly in the school and he worked doggedly in the workshop, fastening his teeth into the problems and worrying





them until they yielded to him. He never gave anything up. Reading was coming easier now, but writing was still a laborious effort. He squeezed out the words (as his father had squeezed out the sugar whirls), gripping a copying-pencil tightly in the stumpy fingers of his left hand. He wrote the letters out painfully one by one, never properly joined, and each page of exercise that he produced looked like a battlefield.

He saw more of his family now. The hovel where his parents lived was emptying of its brood. The swarm of uncouth children was sprouting rapidly. Three were already in the Party; all of them were learning to read and write. One sister was actually studying



medicine, another music; another brother had been sent to the north to help in the management of a big leather factory.

Yuri's life was bounded on all four sides by politics. He studied and absorbed Marx, Engels and Lenin with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, as his pious grandfathers had learned by heart the Talmud. And he was popular amongst his mates in the factory because he was a good worker, kept his word, and didn't waste time making idle speeches.

Yuri had the opportunity at last of actually going to the Opera. How he enjoyed it. He sat hunched up on the plush seat, his square hands clasped on his belly, his Asiatic head screwed on one side, eyebrows raised into semicircles of purest enjoyment. Life was opening to him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now it was time to marry. He looked round carefully before deciding upon Klavdia Karlovna. Klavdia Karlovna was tall and thin, a serious Party worker. She went about her duties with a quiet dignity that Yuri approved. She was not handsome, but she was a good and worthy woman.

Yuri had a stronger personality than his wife. He soon found that he could sway her to his will. Before long she was caring more for him than for her Party work. Yuri, to his horror, saw her turning into a housewife. He decided to put a stop to this at once. He had a long talk with Klavdia, one of the few occasions when he did not limit his speech to a few brief sentences.

Klavdia, who had indeed been looking primarily to his comforts, wept a little. The result was that she gave up all her housekeeping and went to the Communist Academy to study. Once she had got into the current there she gave herself up completely to her new

work. She was intelligent and very disciplined. They soon assigned her responsible jobs. A house-worker came in every day to clean up their apartment. Yuri made the morning tea himself with an electric kettle. They ate dinner at their jobs, and saw each other only occasionally, in the evenings.

Before the autumn Klavdia Karlovna became pregnant. When she produced a son Yuri was very pleased. All was going as it should. Now he was a responsible family man. They called the child "Vilye," after Vladimir Ilyitch. Yuri and the baby got along fine together. Like two young animals they understood each other's noises. Yuri would sit placidly by the stove holding the bundle in his short arms, and looking into the future in the squirming face of his son with calm satisfaction. Sometimes he even remembered not to smoke in the same room as the baby.

There was no excitement in his marriage. He and Klavdia Karlovna jogged along peaceably without a cross word. Their days were busily occupied, and they had meetings most nights. Early maturity gave the household weight and dignity, though Yuri had sudden bursts of schoolboy gaiety when Vilye was old enough to play with. He was fond of his capable, dignified wife. He loved his son. But it was always clear to him that he belonged first to the Party, and that his allegiance to the Party took precedence over all his other emotions.

Klavdia, now a Party instructor, was sent to Kiev when the Ukrainian capital was moved there. And later Yuri, because he was one of the most reliable Party men in the plant, was ordered to England for a year to complete his engineering studies.

He knew not one word of English. Even his Russian had a heavy Ukrainian accent. He packed a small suitcase, put the coveted red passport in his pocket, and embarked on the steamer bound for England.

The boat was full of English school-teachers, returning from educational tours. No one noticed the squat, ugly little man with the arched eyebrows. Only a baby of two (whose mother was also travelling first class) made friends with him during the voyage. With this boy he became very intimate, telling him hoarsely that he had a nose like an electric press-button. He sat singing happily to himself in a deck-chair for hours. He hardly ever finished his meals. Once he reflected how he would have wolfed down such ample dinners, had he had the chance in his famished youth. He was very strong and healthy, really, and needed little food. He enjoyed an occasional bottle of beer, but avoided vodka with shamed remembrance of his hooligan boyhood.

\* \* \* \* \*

When the boat drew in to Hay's Wharf in a dim London mist, Yuri disappeared to his cabin to replace his peaked cap with a brand-new trilby. He looked at himself in the cabin mirror with dismal satisfaction. He loathed such bourgeois headgear, but he was the oldest amongst the Russian engineers and he felt he had to keep up the dignity of his country.

It was raining. Yuri had expected it to rain. It rained for forty-eight hours and then a heavy yellow fog swallowed everything up for three days. Yuri stumbled about in this choking horror, thinking that England was worse than he had expected. As he took the train to Manchester to take up his job, the fog began to clear slightly, and when the train drew in to London Road Station, Yuri absorbed in a glance the dirty rows of slums, the belching smoke, and the English people on the pavements. Some were smartly dressed, and a few in the big cars were expensively dressed, but most of them, he thought, looked miserable.

Yuri found a lodging for himself in Stretford, near the great

engineering works where he was to spend the next year studying. His lodging was bedroom and use of sitting-room in a newly-built brick house half-way down a street of identical brick houses, half-way up an estate of identical streets. They all had the same curtains at the windows, and the same plant, and the same curt warning on the enamel label outside the same green gate:

NO CIRCULARS NO HAWKERS NO HANDBILLS
--

Pondering over the strange forms of individual enterprise in this, his first capitalist country, Yuri trudged blindly back to his lodgings every night through the drizzling rain.

He swallowed the heated-up meat and potatoes presented him by the landlady, who was so scared of her Russian lodger that she bolted from the room after serving him. As he choked down the unpalatable food, he buried his nose in the packets of newspapers from Kharkov; three or four days old these *Pravdas* and *Izvestias* but doses of oxygen to him. Then he studied the English language with immense labour and very little progress, from an out-of-date text-book, and at eleven took himself up the lino'ed stairs to bed.

He looked round these strange surroundings like a lost animal. The cheap varnished furniture, all horribly to match, the chaste prints of loves awakening and more heavens than one, framed in imitation oak, to right and left of the narrow wooden bed. In dim bewilderment he fingered the *objets d'art* on the crochet runner along the mantelpiece, and finally scratched his thinning hair savagely, got himself into the pernicious suit of pyjamas he had bought because he was keeping up the prestige of the first workers' republic, and drew the counterpane over his head like a sick child.

Yuri soon discovered that the English are not such an unemo-

dional race as they pretend to be. He observed that the passion of the Englishman's life is his dog. Beside the beloved hound, all else, the trim front garden, the cherished golf-clubs, the wife herself, were as nothing. Yuri, with his own two ears, heard undemonstrative Englishmen greet their dogs in terms so tender that he blushed to hear them. The dog and the hearth. That was the Englishman's idea of Paradise. Beside these such ideas as Yuri would have died for melted away like snow in the sunshine.

It was a hellish winter for Yuri. In the first place he was ill all the time. Accustomed to the bright sunshine of the Ukraine as he was, the unceasing Manchester rain ate into his bones like tuberculosis. All that winter he, who had never before been ill in his whole life, who had lain in wet fields nights on end in the Civil War without taking harm, lurched from one influenza into another.

He dragged himself out of bed at six, to go through the horrid process of shaving *every* day (a thing he had never done in his life before), and got himself to the factory by seven.

He was interested in the English workmen with whom the factory regulations made it difficult for him to get acquainted, and he heartily distrusted the gentlemen engineers to whom he was assigned, who sat all day in their blue print offices with clean hands and never went near the machinery.

He plugged away grimly at the job of learning, and pined with all his heart for his native Ukraine, for his familiar Party work, for his Vilye and his wife and the smell of Russia.

The English workmen had nicknames for all the Russian engineers there. Looking at Yuri, they saw a stocky figure, silent, with pursed mouth and arched eyebrows. They appreciated his silences and the way he had of looking stupid when he had made a final decision. They liked his self-discipline and his firmness. They soon called him NAPOLEON. They liked him and came to chat

with him whenever an opportunity presented itself. They were very curious about Russia and astonished that Yuri, so obviously a worker, should be paid so well by his Government merely to study.

The long winter dragged itself on. Twice Yuri changed his lodgings, hoping for something more congenial, but everywhere he went he found the same Axminster carpet covering the ten feet of sitting-room, the same over-cooked meat and half-cooked potatoes, with tasteless tinned apricots to follow, the same loves awakening and the same timid airless landlady. In one boarding-house where there was no dog there was actually a little girl. There Yuri



stopped and made friends at once with this child.

She seemed to understand him when no one else knew what he was talking about, for he had no one else to practice his English on and had a heavy Russian accent. So he spent his Sundays playing with Joan, and, grateful for her existence, bought her wildly unsuitable presents.

He had plenty of money . . . and nothing to spend it on. Klavdia and Vilye were well provided for in Kiev. His mother needed nothing.

Playing with Joan he wondered how soon her natural gaiety would be extinguished, how many years before her laughing mouth would become a tight line like so many other women's mouths seemed to become on this lower-middle-class housing estate. What did the future hold for her? At best an early marriage to a clerk or a solicitor, another brick house like this to preside over and cook three meals a day in . . . at worst, perhaps, a routine job, spinsterhood and the unappetising distractions of the local social guild or society for the prevention of something. . . . He thought of his Vilye and his blood warmed at the thought of what the future held for him.

After the first novelty had worn off of buying English shirts and lots of bottles of perfume, for like all Russians he adored scent, he had nothing to do with his money. What he most pined for, perhaps, was opera. There was none to be had. The nearest opera house, in Manchester, had long been made into a cinema, so had practically all the theatres. He was horrified that London, with eight million inhabitants, should only have one opera-house. He couldn't understand that the English didn't greatly care for music, although he noticed at Christmas-time, when they were in a gayer mood, and had drunk plenty of beer, they would close in together in a friendly way and sing mournful songs in chorus.



Opera failing, he went to the super-cinema to hear Grace Moore.

When six weary months had dragged themselves past, Yuri began to look towards the end of his sentence as Sinbad looked towards the tiny spot of light in the cave of skulls. His health was wretched. After one bad bout of influenza, he caught a streptococcus infection on his temple. It dragged on and on. The Russian doctor attached to the London headquarters of his Soviet Organisation, decided he must see a specialist. She couldn't understand what was the matter with Yuri. It didn't seem to be an ordinary ailment that he suffered from; it was something much more fundamental that was wracking him. She sent him off to a Harley Street specialist.

The Harley Street specialist tapped Yuri in vital places and enquired as to the whole of his previous history. Yuri was instantly thrown on the alert. He knew by now that England was a strange country with peculiar ideas about liberty and tolerance. He knew, for instance, that Englishmen could leave their country without special permission and might disparage their government without turning a hair. But he wasn't going to be taken in by a mild-mannered old gentleman trying to spy out things about Russia in this way. Oh no. Yuri's autobiography was amazingly short and totally without incident.

The doctor blinked, wrote out a prescription for a sedative, charged the Soviet Organisation three guineas, and asked the maid to usher in the next patient.

And Yuri went on having influenza and ear-aches and pains in his bowels and horrible migraines, and went on getting up at six and plodding through the day, and at night learning another word or two of this barbaric language that didn't spell as it was pronounced and wasn't pronounced as it was spelled and didn't mean what it said but something quite different when you had

get to the point of saying something in it at all.

Actually what he suffered from most of all was his divorce from politics. Periodically, their time up, a couple of the Russian engineers studying in Manchester would go back to Russia. Yuri saw them off at London Road Station in the rain, longing with all his heart to go with them.

He longed to know what was happening around him but was not allowed, for diplomatic reasons, to go to any meetings in England. He bought the *Daily Worker* every day and struggled through it, after he had struggled through the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times*, and he waited impatiently for the post to bring him his three-days-old *Pravdas*.

Klavdia and Vilje wrote regularly. Vilje's childish handwriting was already better than his own. He didn't get to know any English people, beyond the engineers who invited him to whiskey and soda with bluff uneasiness because he was a stranger in their country, and because his country was buying a lot of expensive machinery from their firm.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

One evening in Deansgate a prostitute accosted him. For a moment he didn't understand. Then he turned and fled. When he got back to his lodgings the acrid smell of her cheap scent returned to his nostrils and he was seized by a bout of vomiting. He opened his parcel of newspapers, when the sickness had subsided, his lips still curled back in disgust.

Now he was getting *Der Stürmer* as well as his usual Russian and English newspapers. Yuri spelled out the vulgar phrases as well as he could with his smear of German, and took in the offensive Jew-baiting drawings without passion. He was amused

that the Nazis should always caricature the Jews as bulge-eyed and hook-nosed. Here he was, as pure-blooded a Jew as most, with eyes as narrow as tea leaves and a small asiatic nose.

Yuri had no particular leanings towards the Jews, as Jews. He was proud of Russia not because he had been born there but because he was a worker and the child of a worker, and Russia had been the first country in the world to release the workers. He was proud of Russia and he had fought for Russia because he was working for something new to take root and flourish there. Yuri felt himself related first of all to all the workers in all countries, and next to all the Communists everywhere in the world, Germany included. To be a Jew meant nothing special to him, beyond being one of the national minorities, like the Caucasians or the Uzbeks. He didn't even know many Jews. He supposed they were good and bad like other people. He was irritated by their exclusiveness and he loathed the Zionists nearly as much as he loathed the fascists . . . for were they not indeed *Jewish* fascists? It seemed clear to Yuri that capitalism allied to inflamed nationalism spelt fascism, whatever name they chose to call it.

At Easter-time he went over to France, on an excursion, for the brief holidays. He thought Paris very beautiful. He walked sedately round the Tuileries in the sunshine, watched the beautiful Easter Service in the Madeleine, and compared the Place de la Concorde a little enviously with the big new square in Kharkov.

The scent of the masses of roses in the Madeleine followed him, and he returned there. It was crowded with all kinds of people, stumbling a little in the sudden gloom after the brilliant light of the sunny street. Automatically he joined the queue of people waiting to kiss the metal crucifix held out by a black-robed acolyte. Each penitent approached, kissed the crucifix, which was automatically wiped by a cloth held in his other hand by the

ascetic who, at the same time, indicated a collecting bag into which each penitent dropped his offering.

On and on it went. The kiss, the wipe, the handful of coin. Hundreds of people in turn, like a regiment of marching soldiers. The shaft of sunlight flecked with floating particles of dust, the shuffling of the bowed line of people waiting to kiss the crucifix, those nearing the priest beginning to fumble in their pockets and bags, the crowded wooden chairs, the dim altar, the scent of the giant cross of roses suffused by the heavier odour of incense. . . . He got outside quickly.

There was so much Yuri wanted to see in Paris. He didn't know where to begin.



He bought a lot of highly-coloured picture postcards for Vil'ye of the Place de l'Opéra and the Arc de Triomphe, and the fountains playing at Versailles. He went for a char-à-banc ride through the city and up to the Butte of Montmartre. He visited the *Grévin*, and pored happily over the mementoes of Marat.

The departmental manager had advised him on no account to miss the *Folies Bergères*, so he decided to go there next. The audience of dull-eyed provincial shopkeepers and English tourists bored him. A girl in a short black satin dress with a large lace bow on her head presented him with a programme and demanded three francs. Yuri didn't understand what she wanted, but blinked suspiciously at the cosmetic-smeared face, and the eyebrows heavily beaded with blue mascara.

In the interval another painted attendant sold him coloured postcards. He didn't understand the words but the leering couple on the card appeared to him vulgar and distasteful. It was a trick obscenity which worked by passing a lit match at the back. He understood nothing.

Yuri couldn't understand a word of the sketches but when the big spectacle started he felt dull shame creeping over him like paralysis. This was the other side of the beautiful city of the fine squares and charming gardens, this selling of human flesh to prurient customers. Yuri, then and there, wanted badly to vomit, as he had vomited after the encounter in Deansgate.

Before he returned to England he managed to go to the Opera. There were practically no seats left because all the provinces were in Paris for their holiday jaunt. At a fabulous price, however, he managed to obtain a bad seat in a box.

It was *Faust*. Yuri knew *Faust* backwards, so many times had he enjoyed it in Kharkov and Kiev, and even in Moscow at the Bolshoi Theatre. He sat, curled up on the hard red plush chair,

Yuri folded blissfully on his stomach, whilst the tedious production unwound itself. Here at last he did not feel the language bar, and he was ready to forgive the mediocre singing and the dusty production, for the sake of the familiar music. He was so happy to understand everything, he longed to explain it to the bewildered honeymoon couple from Lille sitting next to him.

Back to England, he now went oftener to London, for, as the time for his departure drew nearer, there were many meetings to attend and reports to be prepared.

\* \* \* \* \*

At last the order to return. Yuri was overcome with delight. The last weeks were a mad rush. His health was miraculously improved; even the sniffing cold ceased to annoy him.

The English workers were sorry Yuri was going. He was touched that so many of them went out of their way to come and say good-bye to him, bringing him odd little presents of porcelain and views of Belle-Vue framed in red silk.

He had to buy many presents. For Klavdia a dress-length of neat grey woollen material, for Vilye many toys and a real watch, for his mother, who had varicose veins, an elastic bandage, for his friends at the Kharkov factory, gramophone records.

This time it was the happy Yuri who was accompanied to the train by a flock of engineers who waved madly from the platform as the train chugged out of the dreary London Road Station.

He hung out of the carriage window, his face one beam of delight:

“ Good-bye ! Good-bye ! *Das Vidaniye !* So long ! ”

A last thing in London. He must go to Highgate Cemetery to see Marx's grave. The keeper there directed him along the narrow

path. He took a clumsy snapshot with his pocket camera which he had smuggled past the keeper, and sat there looking for a long time. They had wanted to take his remains to bury in Moscow, but the descendants of Karl Marx were reactionaries and would not permit. Dialectics. There was no escaping it. Morosov, who had introduced him to Marxism, had not come with the Revolution. But in Kharkov they would print fifty thousand copies of the photograph he had just taken, and all the workers would scramble to get one.

★   ★   ★   ★   ★

Hay's Wharf. The *Smolny* busy loading cargoes and passengers. The Blue Peter is flying. A little group of friends to wave good-bye to the English tourists. An agitated clerk from Intourist busy checking up the passengers. Sunburned sailors, busy among the chains and derricks. The passports pile up on the purser's table at the head of the stairs. Two blue-eyed stewardesses with short tow hair and high cheek-bones lean idle over the rail to watch the English stevedores. The plump cook's assistant patters across the deck from the cookhouse to the crew's dining-room, bearing a great tureen of steaming soup.

“Good-bye. Good-bye. Write to us. Good-bye.”

Yuri is a poor sailor, but he is too excited at going home to think about his insides. He wanders blissfully about the ship, his hands folded on his stomach as though he were listening to music. Now it seems to him as though he knew quite a lot of English. When the passengers speak to him he can answer them quite easily. He determines when he is again settled down in Kharkov that he shall study English seriously.

He wishes he had got to know English people more intimately.

There was another England besides *The Times* and the awkwardly available whiskies and sodas and universal aspirin cure. He would have liked to know that other England.

Amongst the passengers there was a poor Jew. Aided by the Soviet Consulate, he was returning, after twenty-five years' absence, to his Soviet children in Russia. He was an old man, with clear pink cheeks and dignified ignorant blue eyes. His white moustache was stained saffron from constant tobacco smoking. Now that he was travelling first in the greatest comfort he was determined to miss nothing. He sat next to Yuri and every meal-time Yuri watched him eat his way steadily through the menu from one end to the other, using his knife delicately to push the meat between his lips, and reserving the fork for the vegetables. After his tea and lemon he belched politely. Now in an expansive mood he drew his carefully-folded Czarist passport from his pocket to show to Yuri and the other passengers, and fumbling in his breast, produced a patterned silk kerchief in which were several old photographs.

"Myself, when I left Russia," he explained graciously, pointing to a bearded pompous young man in a *yamelkie*, standing beside his mournful wife and their four children.

"My poor Rebecca, God rest her soul; and this is David my eldest, killed in the War, and this my second son Isaac, now in the Red Army. Jack my third son is an engineer in Rostov and Julia, my youngest, is now herself mother of a family. The last three, God preserve them, did not live."

He answered questions amiably, until one inquisitive student touched on some tender point. He was offended.

"Excuse me, young sir," he said in rebuke, "that is my business."

Yuri had no respect for age without wisdom. He thought the



old man was merely returning to Russia to exploit his children, but he was too happy to be intolerant of anybody just then.

There was a little girl on board, returning to Russia with her engineer father and her mother. Gallina cottoned on to Yuri at once. For one thing she had been in the company of an English nurse, and the few words she knew were English. She couldn't understand her parents at all. She was a lovely child, with brilliant black eyes, hair cropped close like a boy, and two rows of dazzling teeth. Her English nurse, distressed to have her darling snatched from her, had written out her daily routine in tearful handwriting that no one on board could read. In particular had Miss Parkins adopted circumlocutory terms for the hours of functioning. The child's papa, puzzled, took it to the captain who knew English.



Semenko roared with laughter, the immense fellow, shaking all over like a volcano about to erupt. He hoisted Gallina high up into the air and stood her on his giant shoulder, which she liked very much.

"Strange," he rumbled, screwing up his bushy eyebrows. "A child who speaks a different language from its parents already. What a wonderful world lies before you, little Gallia."

Yuri and the captain had long talks about England, in the captain's cabin, over a friendly glass of cognac. The captain, an old Bolshevik, had at one time been a stevedore in Australia, and knew English well. He had just taken Sir Walter Citrine over on his tour, and had summed up his passenger early in the voyage.

"Aï ai," insisted Yuri, tossing down the cognac and popping a piece of black bread into his mouth, "The Englishman! When he is bored he goes to a football match. When he is ill he takes two aspirins. He is so individual that he has a special name painted on his house. He is always troubled with his digestion because he never eats soup. On Sunday he plays golf so that he can avoid conversation, and he pulls down the Opera House so that he can build a *beeeautiful* cinema. He says 'cheerio' when he doesn't want to talk to you any more; he says 'O.K.' when he has no intention of doing what you ask him, and he travels on trains where you can't stretch out your legs. The dog. The dog and the hearth. And then the small square of front garden the size of my finger-nail. For these three things the Englishman will let you govern him any way you please. Aï aï, the English! They are a most extraordinary people."

"Comrade," rumbled the captain of the *Smolny*, placing an immense forefinger on the side of his nose, "we in old Russia knew a nice beautiful oppression under the Czar. No pretence about it. Black Hundreds. Siberia. Prison and Persecution. That

is what I call a good honest oppression. The English are most cunning. They give their workers a few crumbs, and make a pretence of democracy to close their mouths. A sprinkle of popular education. A bit of demagoguery about the Empire. A few blades of grass each. And for this they will work their insides out. For this they will go and commit suicide and cut each others' throats and kill the workers of other countries and let themselves be denied a simple glass of beer after ten o'clock. There are two ways of keeping a people down, Yura Abramovitch. You can do it, for a time, by making them feel too wretched to revolt, like the Czar did, that's one way; or you can persuade them that they are well off and have no need to revolt, that's the other way."

A violent blizzard, fog and wind, slowed down the ship two days from Leningrad. Yuri paced the icy deck restlessly in between storms. These last hours were harder to bear than he thought. He sought out Gallina to comfort him, but she was in the captain's cabin.

"This weather puts ten years on a sailor's life," rumbled the giant Susenko. "My old woman and me, we've lived fifteen years in Petersburg; devil take me if we've ever seen the inside of the Hermitage even. *Nu*. One of these days I'm going to take a nice beautiful excursion with Intourist and see my own city. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

Moscow. Oh how changed everything was. The New Metro was open. Softly illumined marble galleries below the earth. Yuri threw away the hated trilby and made straight for Mostorg to buy himself a new cap. And there in the window, before his very eyes, was a display of Soviet trilbys, arranged in a grand semi-circle, dotted here and there with coquettish bunches of violets.

# MISHA AND MASHA

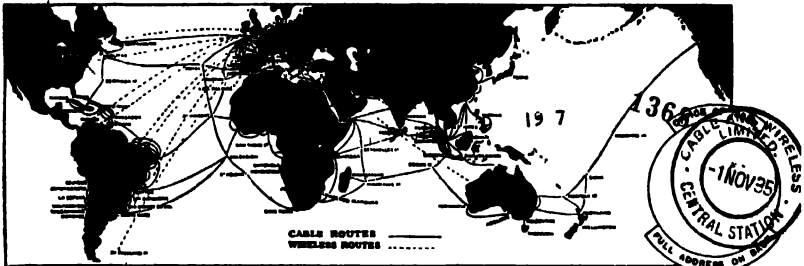
He scratched his head with his left hand, grinned, and went to the Post Office on Tverskaya.

He sent a telegram to Klavdia to announce his safe arrival, one to his factory in Kharkov, and a special cable to his worker friends in Manchester.

Printed in England (Oct. 1914)

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*Natasha Nikolievna*









## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

NATASHA NIKOLIEVNA	.	secretary
PAPA	. . . . .	her father
MOTHER	. . . . .	her mother
ALEXANDER NIKOLIEVITCH		her elder brother
LEV NIKOLIEVITCH	. .	her younger brother
KLAVDIA NIKOLIEVNA	.	her young sister
GRANDPAPA	. . .	Mother's father
GRANDMAMMA	. . .	Mother's mother
GREAT-AUNT AMALIA	.	Grandmamma's sister
KERENSKY	. . . . .	Premier of Provisional Govern- ment in 1917
FATHER GAPON	. . . . .	priest in pay of Czarist Secret Police
MARIA SPIRIDONOVA	.	Social-Revolutionary
GENERAL ANTONOV	. . . . .	counter-revolutionary Anarchist Leader
MAROOSIA	. . . . .	Leader of Greenband Anarchists
SABLIN	. . . . .	counter-revolutionary Anarchist Leader
GENERAL MACKNO	. . . . .	counter-revolutionary General
DORA KAPLAN	. . . . .	Social-Revolutionary terrorist
LUNARCHARSKY	. . . . .	Commissar of Education
DJERDJINSKY	. . . . .	Head of G.P.U.
LENIN	. . . . .	Leader of Communist Party. Chairman of Peoples' Com- missars
ISADORA DUNCAN	. . . . .	the dancer
PAVEL ROBERTOVITCH	.	Natasha's first love
IVAN IVANOVITCH	. .	her husband
IRINA	. . . . .	her first daughter
ILYENA	. . . . .	her second daughter
DMITRI	. . . . .	her son
PAVEL PAVLOVITCH	. .	Dmitri's father
Gm		



## *Natasha Nikolievna*

**N**ATASHA NIKOLIEVNA was born in 1894 in Feodosia, in the Crimea. Her mother was a musician, her father was a barrister. When Natasha was four years old her father was appointed legal representative to Brodsky, the sugar magnate who then owned all the sugar-beet companies of South Russia.

The family went to live in Mahash Kala, on the Caspian Sea, where he had to take up this new post. They moved into an imposing two-storey stone house, standing in lovely gardens with a big orchard beyond. There was a splendid library for her father, a handsome music-room for her mother, and a suite of nurseries for the four children. Wagon-loads of expensive new furniture rolled up the hill every day with green silk furniture for the drawing-room, crates full of elegant porcelain dishes and fine glassware, carefully packed in sawdust and straw, and a magnificent Diderich grand piano for mother.

Papa liked showing off. He was a well-educated man who spoke several languages. He could not live without flattery, however. All his energies were expended upon schemes intended

to call forth admiration and esteem, and upon terrible outbursts of rage when he felt slighted.

No sooner were they installed in the new stone house at Mahash Kala than Papa decided to hold a great housewarming to which all the most important people in the province should be invited. A special cook was engaged to prepare a magnificent banquet, and a host of butlers and waiters hired to wait upon the guests. A calf, roasted whole, was the chief dish in the dinner. Immense quantities of wine were poured into crystal glasses with long stems, and the special cook prepared a pink ice-cream pudding in the form of a high crenellated tower.

After the dinner party the gentlemen kissed the ladies' hands and they all retired to the music room where Mother, dressed in a special new dress from Baku made of black moiré trimmed with purple chiffon, played Grieg.

Natasha remembered all this very well, because she and Alexander, her elder brother, were allowed to come downstairs and make a courtesy to the guests. Alexander wore his hair cut in a straight fringe over his eyes and a black velvet suit. He hated the black velvet suit, and he hated Papa, and he hated the guests. But he loved ice-cream and prayed hard that the guests might leave some, and that the servants might leave some of that.

Papa had a short pointed beard and was very quick-tempered. When he was angry he used to thrash Alexander and break the china. He was very often angry. Mother was beautiful and restrained. She moved about the big house ever so quietly, hoping nothing might happen to make Papa lose his temper.

Papa had ideas about education. He sent to England for an English tutor for Alexander. Papa wanted Alexander to be brought up on the English ideal. He explained this to the tutor. Every day Alexander had to get up at six, take a cold bath, and do Müller

exercises before he started lessons.

The English tutor was a tall thin man from a provincial University. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles and had awful indigestion from the Russian food. Alexander didn't like him and he didn't like Alexander, but Papa paid him well and Alexander had no choice anyway.

Even the girls came in for Papa's ideas about education. He desired them to wear sensible dresses and have only plain constructive toys to play with. But when Papa was recovering from one of his outbursts he always went to Baku and brought home a lot of expensive dolls with no constructive value whatever. When Papa, a few days later, saw Natasha playing with them, he would fly into another temper, smash the dolls to pieces, and scold Mother for bringing up the children so badly. Mother never answered. She just left the room.

The four children all hated Papa. It was the only thing they agreed about. But perhaps Alexander hated Papa most.

After their Nana had been replaced by a German governess, Natasha developed glands and a nervous rash. She had to be dressed completely in white for years, so that she might not risk infection from scratching. And she was forbidden sweets for so long that she lost the taste for them.

Natasha had a very good memory. Papa liked to show her off before his guests. She knew the whole of *Tzar Sultan* by heart, all *Eugene Onegin*, and a lot of Pushkin before she was twelve.

Natasha did not like being a girl. She always wanted to be a boy. All her life she thought if she had been a man she might have been much happier. But except for the teasing of Alexander, and for Papa, who made everyone miserable by his bad temper, she was fairly contented. The nicest moments in her childhood were when Mother, on rare occasions (usually after Papa had been

especially angry), used to sing her to sleep at night. All her life she remembered the sweet clear contralto, singing Lermontov's lullaby:

*"Sleep my darling,  
Quietly the bright moon peeps into thy cradle  
Thy father . . ."*

One day Papa brought back from Baku a wild eagle in a cage. All the four children watched it for hours. Even little Klavdia. They were all frightened of it but sorry that it was imprisoned. And one day the captive eagle managed to escape. Everybody was delighted except Papa. Papa was furious and made a terrible scene. He thrashed Alexander because he said it might easily have been Alexander who left the door of the cage open.

Papa slept in a different room from Mother. Alexander, early one morning, saw Papa coming out of the German governess's room. He told the English tutor who turned very red and told him to shut up and made him do twice the usual number of Müller exercises that morning. The English tutor was uneasy in the presence of Mother. He thought a married woman with four children had no right to be so beautiful.

Papa's outbursts happened often now. He quarrelled with everybody. Alexander kept out of his way as much as possible, but that did not save him from being thrashed.

Papa, having quarrelled with all the important people in the province, finally quarrelled with his employer, Brodski. He was dismissed. The family had to move to Odessa, where Papa believed his talents would be more appreciated in independent practice. The imposing two-storey house was sold. The green silk furniture, the porcelains and crystals that Papa had not yet smashed, and Mother's grand piano, were all carefully packed

up and sent on ahead to their new home in Odessa. The English tutor made a stiff farewell and went back to Birmingham, and Alexander promptly forgot all the English he had been taught.

\* \* \* \* \*

Odessa was then a fine city. The aristocratic section where they lived had beautiful wide streets, and pleasant houses. Papa had rented a handsome five-roomed apartment. Their staff was reduced to only one maid, one manservant and a visiting tutor.

Papa was determined to make a big reputation and a lot of money.

There was an exotic dirty underworld in Odessa near the docks, but that was another world altogether. They never even knew it existed. The four children were happier in Odessa than in Mahash Kala, for they had a lot of relations to play with, and were much freer than before. Alexander was mischievous and made Natasha do all sorts of foolish things which recoiled on her own head. Blindly Natasha obeyed him, weeping for hours afterwards, mortified among the wreckage.

Papa did not find it so easy to make his reputation. He began by quarrelling with all his wife's influential relations, so that they would only call to see her when he was out. Especially did Papa quarrel with Uncle Kostia, a famous gynæcologist with a large and fashionable practice. Uncle Kostia was fond of the children but thought Papa odious.

Papa's family lived in a remote provincial town. They were poor and obscure, and Papa was ashamed of them, for he never went to see them nor invited them to his house. All the same he could not get on with his wife's family either, especially his father-in-law. Grandpapa was ironic about Papa and sceptical about Papa's career.

Mother's grand piano followed them faithfully from one place to the next, as they moved to cheaper apartments. The green

silk furniture was already getting shabby and the elegant ormolu vases looked surprised to find themselves in such inferior rooms.

It was a cruel day for Mother when they had to leave Odessa, because Papa had no practice at all. Papa decided he would go to St. Petersburg with Alexander and establish himself there. In the meantime Mother and the other three children were obliged to go to live for a year in Feodosia with Grandpapa.

Except that they could see Mother was humbled and unhappy, the three children had a lovely year, for it was a pleasant household to live in. Grandpa was rich and urbane, a devout atheist and cultured gentleman much honoured in the town for his dignity and learning. He dressed most handsomely and looked exactly like Victor Hugo, for whom indeed he had often been mistaken during his visits to Europe. Grandma was a sweet old lady, tiny and gay as a bird. She wore saucy little cocked hats with a tuft of feathers at the back, tight pouting bodices like a dove, a gold brooch and chain to match, and her black taffeta gowns rustled coquettishly at every step. She petted Grandpapa, petted the children, was deeply religious, and teased everybody.

The other person in Grandpapa's household was Great-aunt Amalia, Grandma's unmarried sister. She looked like a little bird, too. She was the housekeeper. She wore corkscrew curls and was very romantic.

Great-aunt Amalia was in love with Grandpapa. Whenever Grandpapa went out, the two old ladies fluttered to and fro like pigeons, bringing him clean collars, silk handkerchiefs, and his gold-headed cane. Grandmamma flew to the garden to pick him a buttonhole, Great-aunt Amalia brushed his tall hat. Grandmamma perfumed his handkerchief, Great-aunt Amalia ran to fetch his yellow gloves. And they both watched from the drawing-room window as he strode masterfully down his pebbled drive.



Mother never answered when Grandpapa made ironic reference to Papa's future. She hung her head and drew closer to the children. Great-aunt Amalia watched and watched with her bright black eyes, unsmiling, exquisitely tidy, her secret locked up tightly in her buttoned bosom.

When Papa at last wrote that he had got a job, Mother was relieved to be able to leave Feodosia. She knew Grandpapa was bored with supporting them. Grandpapa proposed that they leave one of the children behind for him to educate. He chose little Klavdia, the youngest. Mother understood why he chose Klavdia. It was because she looked the least like Papa.



So in 1904, Mother, Natasha and Lev packed up their trunks and set off for St. Petersburg.

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Natasha thought St. Petersburg was the biggest city in the world, as the droshky rattled them through the wide boulevards to Papa's apartment in Kirochnaya. Papa had only one servant. After Grandpa's lovely ample household, Natasha thought this was very poor and mean.

Papa was full of ambitions and projects and, when there were guests, he was charming to his wife and children.

One of the assistant barristers who worked in the same district as Papa was a man named Kerensky. Papa knew him well, and admired him. There was a lot of political talk when he was about.

Papa again decided to take a hand in the education of the children. He supervised the tutor he had engaged to give the two boys daily lessons, and insisted on teaching Natasha himself, because he swore that the schools turned out nothing but prostitutes and hooligans.

However, the three children did not learn very much because Papa lost his temper so often and beat them. Papa longed to be a model father and was always trying out new plans to achieve this idea, and always something went wrong and there were thrashings and scoldings and tears all round.

One day Papa announced that he was going to take the children to the circus. Everyone was delighted. At the punctual moment, Papa set off with the three of them, all in their best clothes and on their best behaviour. It was a clear bright day, with little white clouds scudding across a radiant blue sky. The Neva sparkled and shimmered like a sea of diamonds. They were all tiptoe with

excitement for this longed-for treat. Even Alexander felt a moment of goodwill towards Papa.

As they turned into the Nevski Prospekt Papa noticed a speck of mud on Lev's shining boots. His brow clouded. The children shivered in anticipation of the storm. Instantly Papa burst into a furious temper. All the children were smacked and shaken. Alexander had his ears boxed and was promised a thrashing as soon as they got home, for allowing Lev to disgrace Papa in public. They never got to the circus at all. They arrived home again, crumpled and exhausted, just about the time that the clowns were tumbling into the ring.

Natasha never forgot how Papa had spoilt the lovely day for them, just as he spoilt everything for them.

Papa planned to write a series of historical novels, and actually wrote a good deal of satirical verse, which he dedicated to Mother. He was angry with Mother because she did not care much for it. He scolded Mother because he said the children had no manners. And he made all their lives a misery because he was not as important as he desired to be.

The three children used to urge Mother to leave Papa. They wanted peace in their home and there was never any peace where Papa was, but Mother could not bring herself to break up her household no matter how wretched they all were. Papa wanted his children to love and respect him, but they all hated him with a deep common hatred. The only person who loved Papa was Mother, and even Mother could not respect him.

Papa talked a great deal of politics these days. When Father Gapon led the 1905 demonstration he took Alexander out into the street to watch. Papa declared he was a Social-Revolutionary. That was quite enough for the children to know they would never be that, whatever it was.

After the failure of the 1905 Revolution there was a Cossack pogrom in St. Petersburg directed this time against the intelligentsia, not the Jews. Natasha and Alexander helped Mother to move all their furniture into the inner room when the Black Hundreds galloped past, smashing and shooting through the windows. And Papa, at this moment, was nowhere to be found. The children knew that Papa was a coward. Mother did not understand anything of politics, but from past experience she was wary of Papa's fantasies.

Papa could not get on with his new colleagues nor his clients. However well he started, his initial charm and effort to please soon gave way to bursts of rage and sulks. His practice decreased steadily until the day came when they had to leave the five-roomed flat in Kirochnaya and move to three shabby rooms in a dirty house in the working-class suburb of Obuchov. Nothing remained of the grand furniture from Mahash Kala except their Bokhara carpets and Mother's grand piano.

There was a Polish church downstairs, and the three children were very curious about the ceremonies that went on there, for they had been brought up without religion. They had no tutors nor governesses at all now, and ran freely about the suburbs with the children of the Polish workers in the district. They were very happy. Even Natasha, who had always had glands and rashes and attacks of malaria, soon became a strong, healthy girl here. They went skating in the winter and swimming and boating on the Neva in the summer. Papa had become engrossed in a new attack on fame. He was writing a romantic biography of the revolutionary Lieutenant Schmidt. For the time being he was neglecting his children, who were grateful for the peaceful interlude.

As no publisher would undertake the expense of publication of *Lieutenant Schmidt*, Papa himself paid the bill. He raised the

money by selling all their carpets. When the book came out, Papa took pains to cultivate the right people in the literary world. But the novel sold very few copies, not nearly enough to pay expenses.

Papa, smarting under this rebuff to his literary ambitions, made a whole series of scandals at home. The workers who lived on either side of him thought he must be drunk to make such scenes. Mother said nothing. The children kept out of his way.

Natasha was already growing into a handsome girl. When she was sixteen she managed to persuade Papa to let her go to high school. She had been reading hard for years, and knew the classics well. But Papa's efforts at tutoring had given her no education at all. She had a long way to catch up. Lev was allowed to go to school too, but poor Alexander, who studied at home, received the full force of Papa's temper all day long.

Natasha wore her curly hair parted in the middle, combed behind her ears, and hanging down her back in two thick plaits. She had strange green eyes and full lips. There was something soft and sensuous in her face that made Alexander's friends mad about her. They lingered behind to pay her little compliments, and one or two even wrote poems to her. But she was not ready for flirtation.

She was reserved at school, did not join in the erotic gossipings and scandals of the other girls and was voted a snob. She moved exclusively in the circle of her brothers' friends. They read a lot of poetry and started a Pushkin Circle, where Natasha was the only girl.

In the summer of 1911 there was a terrible outbreak of cholera in St. Petersburg. Endless carts laden with corpses drove past their windows. Everywhere there were bills posted up, warning people not to drink unboiled water and not to eat raw fruit, and

every day the laden carts rolled past the windows. The intelligentsia, who were literate, and the aristocrats, who were in their summer homes in the south, escaped. The workers of the city, who could not read the notices, died everywhere like flies. The failure of the 1905 Revolution and the years of reactionary terror afterwards had sapped their vitality, and left them weary and exhausted. Even the very few who could read distrusted all police notices.

Lev was already fourteen, Natasha sixteen, and Alexander turned eighteen. Papa's rages were now so frequent and so brutal that the children thought he must be going mad. They would flare up instantly for no reason at all, culminating in terrible holocausts of broken china. When not content with beating them mercilessly, he began to throw knives in his rage, the children implored Mother to leave him. She would not.

At last the day came when Papa made his usual attack on Alexander, and Alexander, for the first time, turned on him, forced him backwards on to the couch, and planted his knee firmly in his chest. Before Alexander could tie up Papa's hands, Papa cried hysterically:

"I give in!" . . .

It was a dramatic moment for the children. Afterwards they laughed about their Revolution. Papa had lost his power, and though he now vented his rages on Natasha's little dog Hector, he dared not again touch any of the children. Mother was depressed by the whole business and tried, without enthusiasm, to make peace between them and Father.

In the end it was Papa who went away. One day he went off to Omsk in Siberia and never returned. He sent money regularly to Mother, but not enough. So they moved into a smaller flat and Mother started giving music lessons. The faithful Diderich helped

to feed them.

Natasha was studying to go to high school. The boys were studying to go to the University. They all pulled together and managed to make ends meet and for the first time in their lives were peaceful and happy.

News came from Feodosia that Grandmamma had died, and soon after, that Great-aunt Amalia had married Grandpapa. Grandpapa tried to pretend that he had married again in order to continue his pension.

Mother had bad migraines. Now that the strain of the years with Papa were over she felt more weary than ever before in her life. The children were all she thought about. For them she planned and made careful economies. She ran a boarding-house in the summer, so that they might be well-dressed, and worked so hard that she suffered from constant headaches.

Natasha suddenly bloomed at sixteen. Mother was proud of her beauty and in between blinding headaches made her a blue silk dress trimmed with flowers, for her first ball. Natasha, escorted by her two tall brothers, found herself the belle of the evening, danced until she was exhausted, and was overwhelmed with compliments from a well-known sculptor who begged to be allowed to model her.

Mother fell ill. The years of overwork and worry had completely exhausted her. She slowly became paralysed, recovered a little, and in the summer of 1914, exactly one month before the World War started, collapsed and died. She was buried in the forest. And their childhood was over.

Nothing was left now but a lot of debts and Mother's grand piano. Alexander who was already doing his military service, wrote to Siberia to inform Papa what had happened. Papa wrote back curtly that he considered the children now grown up and



able to fend for themselves. That was the last they ever heard of Papa.

The three children drew close together in their misfortune. They sold everything and gave up the flat. Alexander was doing his military service. Lev was studying science and tutoring at the same time to pay for his education. Natasha left school and got herself a job in an office.

The War didn't really mean anything to them yet. Lev, picking up the prevailing tone among the students, was violently



patriotic. Alexander's friends wrote Natasha love letters from the front, and that was all.

Natasha's employer began making her presents of bon-bons and flowers. When he tried to force further attentions on her Natasha abruptly gave up her job. She looked round for another job. In the meantime life went on stupidly.

She went about with Lev. They ate in cheap restaurants where for forty kopecks you could still get an excellent dinner, and when they could afford it watched the ballet from the gallery of the Marinsky.

Natasha's new job was extraordinarily dull. She had nothing to do but type out tedious reports about agricultural matters. She never saw her employers and was left in the office for long periods with nothing to do at all and only the office boy for company. However, the pay was good. Not till years afterwards did she discover that this office was the secret headquarters of the illegal Bolshevik organisation, and that her tedious agricultural reports were merely a blind for the political work carried on there.

Two well-known political leaders were in charge of the illegal work there. She never saw either of them there, then. She was to meet them later in her life under very different circumstances.

Natasha took no interest in politics, very little interest in her job, a good deal of interest in the poetry of Alexander Blok, and immense interest in the tall very handsome man who lived next door.

She was just nineteen. Pavel Robertovitch was twice her age. An engineer. They began meeting secretly. Pavel Robertovitch took her one night to the new production of *Hamlet*, with Gordon Craig's sets, that all St. Petersburg was talking about. On their return he filled a glass with red wine and in his agreeable tenor sang to her Tolstoi's song :

HM

*"Do I love you? I know not  
But this burning which consumes me  
Seems to me like love . . ."*

Soon he moved to another room and Natasha packed her suitcase and went to live with him. She knew he had a wife in the Provinces. She knew her brothers would never forgive her. She didn't think about anything but the urge that possessed her to love and to be loved.

Of physical love Natasha had so far no conception. She loved Pavel Robertovitch for his handsome face, for the greying hair on his temples, for his romantic declarations and for his sentimental voice. She had always longed for the society of beautiful intelligent people. She wanted her life to be full of poetry and flowers.

The War profiteers were making millions. St. Petersburg was hysterically gay. Palatial mansions were going up on all the smart boulevards built out of the profits of the War. Crates of food sent to the front were intercepted, rifled and re-packed with bricks and dirty straw. Trains carrying ammunition and urgent clothing for the soldiers were diverted and used instead to carry champagne and luxurious fare to the St. Petersburg revellers. Every night the stalls of the Marinsky where Kzhezinskaya, the Tzar's mistress, was dancing in *Swan Lake*, blazed with tiaras and costly jewels. Madame Rubenstein, the banker's wife, appeared there smothered with diamonds. Only the workers, grey and haggard in their squalid suburb across the Neva, showed signs of suffering from the strain of the War.

Natasha, who earned good wages at her job, was at last able to indulge in the elegant shoes she had always craved for. She bought herself a big white straw hat, trimmed with green ribbon and one large

rose, a kilted tunic dress of black and a new coat of English make.

And one morning the inevitable happened. Pavel Robertovitch's wife walked in. Pavel turned pale and did not say a word. Natasha went back to her old room and waited for some sign from him, but nothing came. It was a great tragedy for her.

Lev at least could not reproach her in her misery because he was already an interne being trained at the Officers' Training School in the suburbs. Alexander was at the front. Natasha was quite alone.

1917. The War had been going on for three years already and the initial wave of enthusiasm had passed. Food was beginning to get scarce, prices to rise. Strikes and demonstrations took place every day now. Natasha could not buy enough to eat on her wages, so she took on another job as well, in the Ministry of Agriculture. Even she could feel the beginnings of unrest and upheavals.

*February.* Natasha was walking down Lyityeni Prospekt one day when she saw groups of soldiers in the uniforms of the Semyonovski Regiment leaving the barracks to join the demonstrators. She was thunderstruck.

On every side masses of people were flocking through the snowy streets to join in the mighty demonstration. In the adjoining streets hordes of mounted police, and Cossacks armed with whips, swords and revolvers, waited vainly for orders to attack and disperse the demonstration. The orders never came. The soldiers had disarmed their officers and held them captive in the barracks. Not a shot was fired. The demonstration proceeded successfully to its close.

That day the masses of St. Petersburg had their first taste of victory. In the days following many police officers and many of the hated Government spies were attacked and killed in the streets, to the delight of the passers-by.

All St. Petersburg came out on the icy streets. Soldiers returning from the fronts flocked to the Duma when Kerensky in measured dramatic words announced that the Tzarist ministers were all under arrest. Ovations. Wild enthusiasm for the National Government.

Volunteers were needed for the soldiers' canteen at the Duma. Natasha gave up her room and her job to volunteer, sharing another room with a girl friend who lived near by.

The State Duma was in the Tauride Palace. There was a huge kitchen where gallons of cabbage soup were cooked. There was bread, a little meat and kasha, some tinned food. The exhausted soldiers, in rags and boots without soles, deserting from the front in thousands, poured into this canteen, ate ravenously and fell asleep on the bare stone floors instantly.

Natasha worked twelve and fourteen hours a day at the canteen. When she went home she had to step over their log-like bodies. The spirit of the times was very exalted. Never once did any of these common soldiers say one coarse word to her, nor make one ugly gesture.

There was intermittent shooting in the streets. Every day food became scarcer and of poorer quality.

Lev was bursting with truculent patriotism and was all for continuing the Imperialist War. He quarrelled with Natasha over this issue. Romantic though she was, Natasha had seen enough of Kerensky not to be taken in by his theatrical demagoguery. Lev, barely eighteen, smartly dressed in officer's uniform, came to say good-bye to her before he left for the front. He disappeared into it. She never saw him again. He was killed or perhaps died of wounds. No one knew what happened to him.

The soldiers deserting from the front were being re-formed under Kerensky's plan and sent back to the trenches to continue the War. The canteen stopped, and the Provisional Government

took up its headquarters at the Tauride Palace. Natasha was given a job there in the Ministry of Labour. She saw Kerensky frequently and liked him less each time. After each heroic peroration he used to collapse into complete hysteria. When at the height of his speech his voice rose to a scream, his pale eyes gleamed in his wrinkled livid face, saliva flowed from his mouth.

Here in the Department of Labour of the Provisional Government, Natasha made the acquaintance of her first Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks, although popular support for their programme was rapidly growing, still only formed a minority in the Provisional Government. Everywhere there worked a nucleus of Bolsheviks, the very cook of Nikolei Nikoleievitch himself, uncle to the Tzar of Russia, was a Bolshevik. Kerensky was still thundering grandiose speeches, but the people were getting tired of them.

Everyone, except the Provisional Government, wanted the War to stop. Food was steadily growing scarcer, dearer, and worse. Everyone felt on the verge of great happenings.

Natasha squeezed herself into one meeting at the Duma where the gathering was filled with sailors from the Baltic Fleet. Impatient at the hot air from the Tribune, at the play-acting of Kerensky, resplendent in an English cut uniform and high field-boots, and of the hysterics of Marie Spiridonova, the Social-Revolutionary, the sailors hammered their rifle butts incessantly on the floor until they succeeded in breaking up the meeting.

Inflation. New paper money.

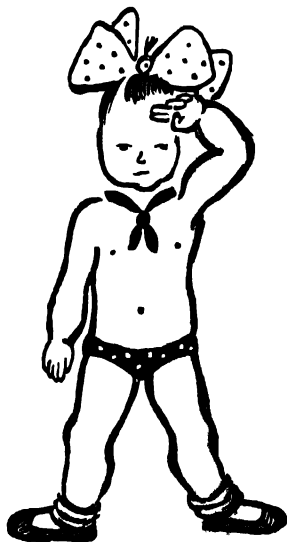
Everything was counted in millions. The new notes were called Kerenskys.

On the 4th of April, Lenin came through Germany in a sealed train.

The Labour Department where Natasha worked now had to change its headquarters. It was moved to the private mansion of

the ex-Chief of the Political Police, who had escaped abroad. His house and all his servants remained exactly as before. The servants were obsequious and obliging. They expected it all to blow over soon, his Imperial Majesty Tzar Nikolei the Second to be back again on the throne, and all as before.

Food was very difficult to get. Natasha, in addition to her secretarial job, was put in charge of the canteen. There were Mensheviks and Bolsheviks working together in the Ministry of Labour and the Mensheviks (who still formed the majority in the Provisional Government), tried to divert the food from the Bolsheviks on every occasion.



Natasha was romantic about the Bolsheviks. She thought they were fine fellows. One of them, however, she did not like. He was big and rugged, dressed in the rags and faded cotton shirt in which he had escaped from his exile in Siberia. He had been in the Party since 1904. He hated the Mensheviks bitterly. In startling contrast to the polished manners of the other diners, he sat at table frowning and irritable. His name was Ivan Ivanovitch. He was a printer by trade, son of a cobbler.

On the 6th and 7th of July the Bolsheviks led the people's demonstration against the Kerensky Government. The streets were full of workers marching. Two slogans repeated themselves, again and again on the scarlet banners.

“BREAD AND PEACE !”

“DOWN WITH THE IMPERIALIST WAR !!!”

From the balcony of Natasha's office, the Mensheviks watched the demonstration storm past below. They were angry but scared of the multitudes they saw united against them.

From now on it was an open struggle. The Bolsheviks gathered their forces together and installed themselves at the Smolny Institute, under the direct leadership of Lenin. Natasha was invited to come and help with their secretarial work for there was a great shortage of technical workers. She went. She worked on the *Trades Union Magazine*, edited by the surly Ivan Ivanovitch. Natasha worked very hard to keep up as the jobs piled in.

The Smolny was like a hive. Day and night the work went on; people poured in and out; messages, orders, reports, streamed through. Full of vigour and good spirits, pumping courage continually into everybody, a short man in a shabby European

suit and a faded green tie, walked rapidly about the place in boots that had been re-cobbled so often that the soles were ludicrously thick.

He was bald. His eyes were extraordinarily penetrating.

Ivan Ivanovitch lost his temper and shouted at her one day. Overwrought, Natasha burst into tears and threatened to leave. They both apologised and made friends. Ivan Ivanovitch then asked if he might escort her home since the streets were dangerous. She was flattered by this attention from such an important and busy worker. The night they expected the Smolny to be bombed, Ivan Ivanovitch begged her not to stay. But she did stay. The danger passed and the attack was never launched, however, although they were ready waiting.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ivan Ivanovitch was eight years older than Natasha. His life had been grim and bitter. He had lived only for the Movement, had given up all his life to it, all his thoughts, all his dreams. He was quite innocent of women.

Now he found himself violently in love for the first time with a handsome girl of bourgeois origin, no political education, and no allegiances beyond her own romantic fancies. He was no coward. He was prepared to tackle anything, but this experience unnerved him. He could see that Natasha was attracted to him for all the wrong reasons. He guessed that she was thrilled by the Movement he worked for and not for what he was as a man. It pained him that he loved her as a woman and not for her character, for although he knew her to be painstaking and conscientious on the paper he edited, he saw it was chance which had brought her into their camp; she might as easily have been on the



other side. Moreover, since she did not love him, he foresaw that she might one day love somebody else.

There was no time to analyse these feelings. They welled up and hurt him. All the time he was tearingly busy on more urgent and more vital things. If it should go well, it would be wonderful. If it didn't, he could not, dare not stop and struggle to put it right. There were more important things than his own private life these decisive days.

On the 25th of October, Natasha, with some dim perception of the historic significance of the document she was preparing, typed out the famous Bolshevik resolution decreeing:

- (1) Peace, with an invitation to the Peoples and Governments of the belligerent countries to conclude a democratic peace without annexations or indemnities.
- (2) The abolition of private ownership of land; all land to be handed over to the local district land committees.
- (3) The formation of the first Soviet Government; the Soviet of the Peoples' Commissars.

At 3 a.m. Ivan Ivanovitch returned to his room at the Astoria Hotel, where he had asked Natasha to wait for him, with the great news. The Provisional Government had fallen. The Bolsheviks had taken power in the name of the Workers and Peasants. He had been appointed the first Peoples' Commissar for Posts and Telegraphs.

Now that there was a brief respite, Ivan Ivanovitch asked her calmly and seriously to marry him. Before she accepted, Natasha, with an effort, told him about Pavel. She knew she did not love Ivan Ivanovitch. But she respected and admired him. She hoped the rest did not matter.

All this time the theatres in St. Petersburg continued gaily. Ugly, graceful Kzhezhinskaya danced *Corsair* at the Marinsky,

trembling with cold in the icy theatre, unheated owing to lack of fuel, before crowded audiences of workers, huddled in their sheep-skin greatcoats, stamping their felt boots for warmth, and puffing white wreaths like smoke from their cold lips. All the theatres went on playing; Shakespeare, Chekhov, Gorki. Never had the theatres been so packed before.

The trams had stopped running. The bread ration had fallen to fifty grammes per day of the coarsest black bread. Money had no purchasing power at all and the shops were absolutely empty. The streets were deserted.

Natasha and her husband lived at the Astoria in Room 372, in dreary splendour. The Government didn't get enough to eat either. These were the conditions of the first five months of their married life.

1918. It was decided to transfer the Government to Moscow, where there was less danger from attack. A special train was provided for members of the Government. It was so hot in the coupé that Natasha let down her long hair. The journey took twenty hours.

In Moscow, the food situation was much easier. Shops were open and trams were running. There was still plenty of food for sale on Ochotni Ryad. Natasha, rushing out to buy, had her purse stolen at once. She wasn't used to the dexterity of the Moscow thieves.

For the time being they were put up at the National Hotel, with other Government workers. Inflation was playing havoc with normal calculations. Everything was in millions and milliards. The people called the fine new notes "Limonchiki." A piece of bread cost three million roubles, which was worth a kopeck or two. There was still intermittent shooting going on. An uprising of Anarchists in Moscow was suppressed by the new Government

in the midst of their frantic struggles to get things going again. Street cleaning was at a standstill, and the dirt piled up in the alleys, inviting infection. Thanks to the desperate efforts of Ivan Ivanovitch, telephones were in working order and letters were being delivered again. All the theatres were open and there were hundreds and hundreds of droshkies anxious to take you anywhere at astronomical figures. The saucy girls used to sing:

*"I know I'm very beautiful  
If Trotsky won't have me  
Then Chicherin will."*

All the time there were meetings, meetings, meetings. Everyone was at a tension, living on a higher plane, where all experience was magnified and intensified. There was no rest, no peace. Always a great surging forward with shouting and banners.

Never had the Moscow theatres been so crowded and with such audiences; ragged workers and peasants, soldiers, sailors, deputies with slant eyes from the far corners of Russia, dark-skinned Caucasians, blond giants from the Ukraine, women suckling babies.

Chaliapin, wavering in his allegiance, appeared at a big Comintern meeting to sing the *Dubinushka*. He roared the final couplet so menacingly that his intentions were obvious. And soon afterwards he fled from Russia to ally himself with the reactionaries.

Ivan Ivanovitch, who saw very little of her, was terribly jealous of his handsome wife. He was jealous against his desire and against his principles, and he hated himself for being jealous. But he was jealous. He had no time to rationalise his jealousy. He was working madly, eighteen to twenty hours a day, sometimes more. Natasha didn't love him. She was attractive to men. She liked to please. She was of bourgeois origin. He loved her but he distrusted her.

There was typhoid epidemic. Bread was very scarce. Life was not easy. And Natasha early in the year, found herself pregnant. Ivan Ivanovitch was more pleased than Natasha. He hoped this might bring them together. The marriage was not working out well. The more he distrusted Natasha, the more she tugged at the restraining bonds holding her. In the presence of other people, Ivan Ivanovitch always kept close beside his wife and behaved with severe restraint. He never dreamed of looking at another woman. Natasha's easy charm with men embarrassed and shocked him. They quarrelled often and bitterly. After each quarrel Ivan apologised desperately and kissed her, and trusted her no more than before. He was deeply unhappy and so was she. He was delighted to see the child grow within her, and longed for Natasha to love him so that he should not be jealous and make them both



wretched. But Natasha grew further away from him each month. She hadn't wanted a child. She accepted it without enthusiasm and hoped for a son."

Ivan Ivanovitch was ordered to the Crimea on political work. In the train, after another quarrel, Natasha begged him to take her to Feodosia to Grandpapa and Great-aunt Amalia. Deeply offended Ivan promised he would. For several days after this they sat side by side, silent and depressed, while the train rumbled slowly southwards. Another Commissar, a friend of Ivan Ivanovitch, who was travelling with them, was mystified by their odd behaviour. Miserable, Natasha confided in him what the matter was. The friend did his best to make peace between them, exhorting Ivan Ivanovitch to be less suspicious and assuring Natasha that her husband only made her miserable because he loved her too much. And finally the friend produced his trump card. Ivan Ivanovitch could not leave his wife behind at Feodosia, because they couldn't go to Feodosia anyway, as the Whites were already in possession of the Crimea. They made it up.

Their journey was menaced by roving bands of Anarchists and Greenbands. At one point, Antonov, the head of a troop of bandits stopped the train. Ivan Ivanovitch had a leather bag full of gold coins which had been entrusted to him for Government use in the Crimea. This he refused to give up. Antonov put two armed guards in their coupé and declared them under arrest. They expected to be shot. Natasha, exhausted, said she was tired and settled down to sleep. Meanwhile the friend who had made peace, slipped off, rounded up a horse, and galloped off to bring help. After a volley of fire from the Reds, Antonov and his men made off. The train moved on again. Natasha woke up.

The more south they got, the better the food. At every village the bread became whiter and whiter. Their appetites sharpened

by their long months of hunger, they both ate like wolves. After the strain of the journey, Ivan and Natasha were beginning to be closer to each other. Ivan, now his jealousy was quietened, proved a devoted husband. Natasha was very big with her baby. It made her walk in a comic, clumsy way that touched Ivan. "Mimishka," he called her tenderly, "my little bear." He fed her and looked after her carefully.

At Yaysk orders were waiting for Ivan to change his route for the seaport of Novo-Rossisk, where there was trouble from the Social-Revolutionaries in the Black Sea Fleet. Ivan handed in the precious leather bag of gold to the bank to be returned to headquarters, and they set off for his new destination by motor-boat. The Caspian Sea was very stormy and they were obliged to remain below because there were Mensheviks on deck.

Natasha was installed in the villa of a former general, whilst Ivan went to take up his work of commissar amongst the sailors of the Black Sea Fleet.

Natasha worked as his secretary when he was home. Sometimes they walked together in the mountains and amongst the masses of iris and roses in the lovely gardens of the villa. This was the only happy period they ever knew together.

There was alarm in the Black Sea Fleet. The Germans were already at Sebastopol, waiting to pounce. The Government cabled orders to Ivan to save the ships from the Germans at all costs; to sink them if necessary. It was necessary. Ivan's task was not easy. His sincerity and political knowledge were obvious but he was too simple to make stirring orations to an audience accustomed to theatricality. He felt he was making poor headway. All the officers in the fleet were Whites, most of the sailors were Anarchists, the rest Social-Revolutionaries. Only very few in each ship were Communists. Ivan, calling meetings on the armed

cruisers, was accused of espionage and nearly lynched in the storm of wild opposition when he proposed the necessary measures to save the fleet from the Germans. After this a huge Communist sailor appointed himself Ivan's bodyguard. The sailor was so upholstered with rifles, bayonets, pistols, hand grenades, cartridges and daggers, that he bristled like a walking arsenal. This sailor was deeply devoted to Ivan Ivanovitch and followed him everywhere he went. Ivan said he was in more danger from an accidental explosion of his bodyguard than from the whole hostile fleet.

They moved into the town, ready to be off at a moment's notice. Novo-Rossisk was full of dark elements. Wandering bandits, spies, and provocateurs in the pay of the Whites and the Germans, slunk about the ports.

One evening in a café they witnessed a strange scene. At the next table sat two burly sailors and a neurotic-faced woman with a revolver thrust through her belt. The woman was dressed in a ragged skirt and a coarse grey shirt. As they watched she rose menacingly, pressed her revolver into the hands of one of the sailors, and spat out in a tense voice:

"Now get outside and shoot yourself!"

Immediately there was an uproar. Ivan Ivanovitch, fearing to be mixed up in a riot, got Natasha safely away. Afterwards they discovered that the hysterical woman was none other than Maroosia, the bloodthirsty woman chief of the Greenbands, punishing one of her men for a breach of discipline. (The Greenbands were anarchist Condottieri who harassed both the Whites and the Reds.) Her favourite method of choosing recruits for her army was to push the applicant up against a wall and open fire around him. If he showed any fear he was rejected. A small-town schoolteacher by origin, the havoc of the Civil War had unleashed the sadistic impulses in this hitherto reactionary prude. She was

the product of the Civil War, and was swept away in the Civil War, without leaving any other trace in history than a string of horrible legends about her bravado and sadistic orgies.

Ivan was recalled to Moscow. He had done his best on a difficult job. As the train chugged out of the station, the first explosions of the first ship being destroyed boomed in their ears like a farewell. Many of the Black Sea sailors travelling back on the same train burst into tears and sobbed bitterly at the sound. They loved their boats. This destruction was a personal tragedy for them, who had worked so long on them and knew them as a mother knows her child.

And so they returned from Moscow, with a machine gun on either side of their wagon, Ivan nerve-wracked and depressed by the partial failure of his task; surrounded by the misery of the sailors whose ships were being blown up. They carried with them quantities of foodstuff for hungry Moscow, flour and cereals, and fish and caviar from the gluttoned seaports.

There were rumours of an armoured train approaching. No one knew on whose side it would be. Natasha, bored by inactivity, hoped there would be a real fight so that they could use their machine guns.

Ivan scolded her angrily for such romantic folly. The train approached. A parley. Great relief. It was a Red train.

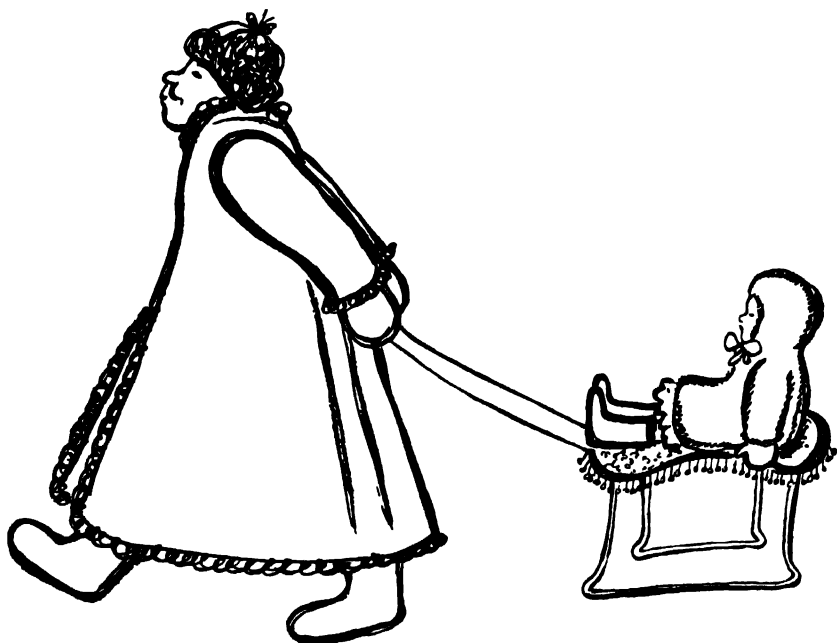
The nearer they drew to Moscow, the scarcer became the food. They arrived at last and went straight to the Kremlin, where a department had been reserved for them. The food they had brought was evenly distributed. Everybody ate ravenously, but no sooner had they settled down than the Kremlin itself was bombarded by an uprising of Social-Revolutionaries, led by their handsome leader, Sablin. Many of the Social-Revolutionary sailors of the Black Sea Fleet were in it. The rising was put down.



Natasha was now immensely big. The other Government workers teased her good-naturedly and assured her that she would have twins. Their apartment was near the monastery of the Kremlin. Every day during the last weeks of her pregnancy, she used to wander about there, looking at the treasures, and listening to the Greek service conducted by the priest for the outside Christians who came to service there.

It was just before the child was born that Dora Kaplan, agent of the Social-Revolutionaries, made an attempt to assassinate Lenin.

In October, Natasha, after great anguish, gave birth to a daughter. The child weighed ten and a half pounds. Natasha was



disappointed not to have a son. But Ivan liked his baby. He sat with her whenever he could snatch a moment, and was kindness itself.

The first *subotnik* started, Lenin himself leading the Kremlin staff into action on free-day by carrying wood to clear up the litter in the Kremlin courtyard.

There was a crèche and a kindergarten for the children of Kremlin officials and workers. This kindergarten was established in the Chudov Monastery. All day long the gloomy vaults resounded with their happy laughter.

When Ira was six months old, Natasha went to work again, leaving her with a nurse. Immediately Ivan Ivanovitch became jealous again. The old trouble started. When she was pregnant he had been gentle and considerate to her. Now he was once more exacting and suspicious. They quarrelled and quarrelled. The only pleasure was the baby girl. She was strong and healthy and very happy.

Natasha took on a job in the reception-room of Lenin's secretariat. She arranged appointments and answered letters. It was hard work. The little man was very good-natured but firm, exacting in his demands for punctuality and accuracy. He himself worked longer hours than anybody. Streams of people passed through her hands on their way to his study, some in high command, others simple peasants with their grievances. He disliked the smell of tobacco, and anyone who wanted to smoke had to go into the ante-room.

Trotsky, with messages from the front, sharp-faced, in smart military uniform; Stalin, alert and strong, his good-natured face slightly pock-marked, never without his big pipe, which he used to come outside to puff at in the ante-room.

Lenin never forgot the early fighters in the Revolutionary

Movement and looked after them when other people had forgotten them. Always he saw history as a moving river where the present depended on the past and the future on the present.

Ivan was happy with his baby daughter and having persuaded Natasha to stay at home for a few months, happy with his wife. They went to many meetings. Before long Natasha insisted upon taking up her job again. She worked harder than ever. The stream of visitors in the little man's office grew heavier; delegates from the front, delegates from the national minorities, delegates from factories, from the workers, from the peasants. Everybody in the Kremlin working at top pressure.

At last Natasha fell ill with throat trouble, caused by speaking too much. When she recovered, her voice was permanently weakened and husky. To her great disappointment she had to give up her job. Ivan came to see her in the sanatorium. She was not allowed to speak. They decided that was an ideal arrangement because they did not quarrel.

1920. They were unhappy. He did not know how to please her, and his anxiety made him more clumsy. He was a good and devoted husband, a straight and honest man, but a shy, unimaginative lover. Natasha thought if a woman could be in love with a fine character then she might have been in love with her husband. But there is more to marriage than that.

The tension between them grew unbearable, and to her dismay she found herself again pregnant. Ivan, a member of the Presidium of Trades Unions, was away from Moscow a good deal during this time, first at the Front, then in the cities. She was grateful for his absence. She didn't want another child at all, and only reconciled herself to the idea in the desperate hope that this time it might be a son. The months of waiting for the second child were the dreariest she had ever known. She was sure now that she

couldn't go on living with Ivan much longer. She couldn't make any plans for the future, and longed to escape.

Irina was going on for two when Natasha, after a horribly difficult delivery, gave birth to a second daughter. When the nurse brought the new baby to her she wouldn't even look at it. She was deeply unhappy. Ivan called his second daughter Ilyena, like Irina, a heroine from Turgenev, whose novels he loved.

Not surprisingly Ilyena was a nervous and delicate child. Natasha herself lived on the verge of a nervous collapse for many months. She and the new baby irritated each other. The baby seemed to resent her as much as she resented the baby. The only person who loved the new baby was little Irina, who adored her and was the only one who could keep her quiet.

In 1920, when Ivan was ordered to Kharkov to work in the famine district, Natasha took Ilyena and went with him. Twelve kilometres only from Kharkov, Makhno, the bloodthirsty White-Guard Tzarist general, was launching an attack. There they stayed whilst the Red Army was forcing his retreat.

Natasha tried to accustom herself to the wretched mite who whined and snivelled so much, as if in shame at being a girl instead of a boy. She had to struggle with herself not to abandon the child altogether in the forest. Ivan was already fond of the baby, but Natasha hated her.

Back to Moscow to work again. In the midst of almost famine conditions Isadora Duncan had arrived from Europe with the ambition of teaching the Workers' children Greek dancing. Under the patronage of Lunarcharsky she installed herself in a huge ball-room on Kropotkina. But before very long she became much more interested in the drunken poet Yessenin than in teaching Greek dancing to the children of the proletariat. But the school went on just the same. Swathed in the simplest of costumes,

an oblong of red calico, the snub-nosed Slav children ran about the parquet in concentric circles.

Natasha and Ivan were working very hard. They gave up all attempts at marriage and shared their apartment like two strangers. She could not love Ivan. The more he loved her, the less she loved him. All his attempts to please her, all his efforts to win her over, irritated and disgusted her. Frustrated, he had bursts of temper which reminded her of Papa and sent her shuddering out of the apartment. She was making them all miserable, and longed to get away from this wretched household.

It was at this crucial moment that Natasha met another man named Pavel. He was clever and ugly, with an ugliness that attracted women, like bees to a honey-pot. Within a few days she was madly in love with him, had given herself to him. Pavel understood women in a way that Ivan would never understand them. He knew exactly how to get any woman he wanted, and he took all the women he wanted.

Natasha, living in a state of high tension in a tumbling world, gave herself to this Pavel with a completeness that frightened her. She had to tell Ivan Ivanovitch. She had no desire to deceive him. All she wanted to do was to go away.

The two little girls, now both at kindergarten, were charming. She left them entirely in charge of their nurse; she paid no attention to them whatever.

Natasha had to tell Ivan sooner than she thought because she was again with child. Ivan was overwhelmed when she told him. He was so hoping against hope that they would come together again. He loved her and knew he would never love anyone else. He was sent to work in St. Petersburg, and from there he wrote her several times. Painful words from a man who never spoke idly, wrung out of him one by one, trying to reach her to explain what

she meant to him. He begged her to have the new baby and let other people bring it up so that they might come together again. He forgave her for her infidelity and blamed himself for not knowing how to please her. He said if he were not a Communist, he would commit suicide.

She did not answer his letters, grotesquely stamped with stamps marked one thousand roubles. For the first time she was aware of the feelings of a mother. She knew surely she was going to have a son and nothing could touch her self-confidence and poise. She saw a good deal of Pavel Pavlovitch before she set off to St. Petersburg to break with Ivan.

She found Ivan had prepared a new flat specially for her arrival, and filled it with lovely furniture and flowers and all the things she liked. Drawn with misery and sleeplessness, Ivan was determined to settle things one way or another. It was essential that his Party work should not be allowed to suffer any longer from his personal troubles, because the happiness of countless other people depended upon his ability to fulfil his Party obligations. Too decisive a man to permit himself so much vacillation, he begged her, if not to choose him, then to make a definite break, so that he might try to put together his life in another pattern.

It was while she was in St. Petersburg that she met her brother Alexander again, by chance on the Nevski Prospekt. He was without a job, terribly shabby and thin. After the collapse of Kerensky's army, he had fought for the Reds. Now he was in St. Petersburg looking for work.

A letter came to Natasha from Pavel in Moscow. He knew unerringly how to handle the situation. He sent Natasha a poem, scribbled on a loose sheet of rough paper torn from his notebook. And in the final scales, it was that small poem which decided her to break from her husband.

It was not a good poem, but it was good tactics. To this day Natasha has kept that scrap of paper. It is the symbol of her life, where fantasies are more real than reality.

So she broke with Ivan. Shattered, he nevertheless behaved very well at the last, because he loved her and really cared more that she should be happy than that he should keep her. He arranged to keep her supplied with what money she needed for the children, and he begged her to have the apartment in the Kremlin for her own use. He even found a job for Alexander on the newspaper *Izvestia*. She left her husband and returned to Moscow as fast as she could with a full heart and bright hopes.

Thinking to give Pavel a glad surprise, she went straight to his apartment earlier than he expected her. From the hallway she thought she heard voices and entering the room, discovered him in the very act of adultery. She went back to her apartment, locked herself in, and wrote him a tragic letter, refusing ever to see him again.



In September 1922, Natasha gave birth to her son. She had a month of fever in the Kremlin hospital, and she and the baby both nearly died. Then she recovered. When Pavel heard that she had a son, he flung down his cap on the pavement in a burst of pride. Resolutely she refused to see him, although he bombarded her with eager messages.

Natasha went to work again. With something of her mother's spirit, she adapted herself to the life she found herself living. She was a mother without being a wife. She had two husbands eager to live with her, neither of whom she could live with, although one of them she loved. It was hopeless, and thinking it out gave no

only a migraine. At least she was able to lie on the comfortable bed she had made for herself without complaining anybody. She had choked down the loneliness of the last months, even some of the bitterness she felt against Pavel.

Now all her life was devoted to her son, Dmitri Pavlovitch. For him only she worked and planned. He was a delicate, sensitive baby. She poured all her strength and force into the little creature. Irina, who always loved children, was delighted with her new brother, although Natasha was so devoted to him that she soon began to feel the first pangs of jealousy.

Ivan came to Natasha's aid when she found things too difficult and offered to take Ilyena away to bring up himself. Ilyena, strong-willed and violent-tempered, didn't want to go, and screamed "*Mamma ! Mamma !*" all the way down the echoing corridors of the Kremlin.

At last a letter from St. Petersburg. Ivan wanted her to be





absolutely certain that she had made up her mind never to return to him. He wanted her back. If she was finally decided against him then he would try to find another wife, more suited perhaps to his nature. He asked her forgiveness for having caused her unhappiness in the past, and promised to be at hand if ever she needed his help.

Natasha didn't answer.



And now life suddenly blossomed for Natasha. She had adjusted herself to her situation. She found herself in love with no one but her little son. The strain of the last few years dropped away as though by magic, and she became lovely to look at. Never were her strange green eyes more luminous, her full mouth more inviting. She who had borne three children, had a firm slender figure. She dressed charmingly, everything she wore became her. She had a score of friends, lots of parties. Men flocked around her. She flirted, was gay, and cared nothing at all for any one of them. She worked and earned good wages. Ivan sent money for Irina, and Pavel for his son. These anxious years of slow recuperation after the famine, were for her the happiest years of her life.

Dmitri grew into a little boy. He had pointed green eyes, a pretence of a nose, and a soft sulky baby mouth that went through her like a dagger. It seemed to Natasha that this small male creature understood her as no man she had known had ever understood her. He responded to every mood, every thought that entered her. She adored him. She nursed him through his baby sicknesses with a tenderness that no man had ever roused in her. But Dmitri was fragile, and all the care she lavished on him could not make him strong.

**1924. Lenin's death.** Ivan came from St. Petersburg. In their mutual grief, he and Natasha came together again. She took Irina with her to the catafalque in the *Dom Soyus* where, day and night, the workers and peasants surged slowly through to take their last leave of their leader. Women fainted, and everywhere there was the noise of sobbing. Irina, too, cried bitterly.

The day they buried Lenin was cruelly cold. People walking to the funeral were almost petrified as they walked. There was a five-minute silence throughout the whole of Russia. In the street Natasha, wrapped in heavy furs, had part of her cheek frozen as she stood silent in the crowds. Never had there been such an intense quiet. The bitter cold seemed to accentuate it. Lenin was gone. For weeks they all lived in a daze.

Natasha's apartment in the Kremlin was almost next door to Djerzhinsky, the chief of the G.P.U. She was very fond of this popular leader . . . he was such a kind and sympathetic neighbour. The Kremlin children all loved him and little Dmitri (who had a passion for soldiers) spent more time in his flat than at home. Djerzhinsky lived just as simply as Lenin. Little Dmitri ran in and out and played with his son. Djerzhinsky gave Dmitri a little brass dog on a marble stand from his desk. It was a paper-weight really. Dmitri pretended many things with his brass dog, but mostly it was a squadron of cavalry.

Returning from a heated meeting late one night Djerzhinsky collapsed exhausted, and died within a few minutes. Natasha felt his loss keenly and Dmitri, who did not yet understand death, kept on asking and asking where his tall friend with the kind eyes had gone. It seemed to Natasha that everything she loved was always snatched from her. She gathered the boy to her more closely. He was still not strong, but was growing visibly healthier under her constant care.

Dmitri was very masculine. He loved soldiers and guns, and covered his copy-book with spirited drawings of Budyonni's Cavalry going into action.

Irina was already a Pioneer. She spent the summers with her father and Ilyena, torn between her love for her father and her admiration for her handsome mother, who looked so much more elegant and attractive than other girls' mothers. Irina took entirely after her father. From the beginning she was simple and unpretentious. She was a worker's child and looked like a worker's child. She had no natural gift for coquetry like her mother. She chose the plainest sailor blouses and skirts to wear, belted tightly at the waist with a wide military belt, and craved not at all after the elegant, high-heeled shoes Natasha had always pined for in her childhood. She was intelligent, but not brilliant like Dmitri. She studied hard and was more at home with the laundress than with her mother's literary friends. She was devoted to Dmitri, but hurt that her mother so obviously preferred him. She had sudden fits of brooding and temper. Natasha wondered what was the matter with her. It didn't occur to her that Irina was jealous of her favoured brother and had no other way of attracting attention to herself.

That section of the Kremlin where Natasha lived was to be pulled down and rebuilt as the Government needed extra quarters for the Red Army. All the workers who lived there were transferred to the big new apartment house specially built for them in the Leninski District.

Ivan, in the meantime, had married again. An unpretentious woman who loved him, worked hard in the Party, and did her utmost to make life smooth for him. When he was sent to Rostov to direct a big new enterprise they established their home there and in the course of time had several children.

When Irina came to stay with them for the summer, Father's new wife received her kindly, realising the child's loyalties were under great strain. Irina was always much happier there than at home. She couldn't understand how her mother had wished to leave such an able Party man as her father, who worked so devotedly and was held in such esteem by his comrades. But she understood that Father had been unhappy with Mother because she knew how it felt when Mother loved someone else much better than you.

Irina longed for an ideal home where her father and her mother loved each other and loved her, where everything was in order, and where she could bring her friends to show off her father.

Irina was very friendly with the boy upstairs. He was named Dmitri too. They went skating together and told each other all their troubles. To him only did Irina complain of her mother's obvious favouritism. It was a bad period for Irina. She worked doggedly at school to make progress, but nothing she did brought her to her mother's attention except capricious scenes which Natasha was helpless to deal with.

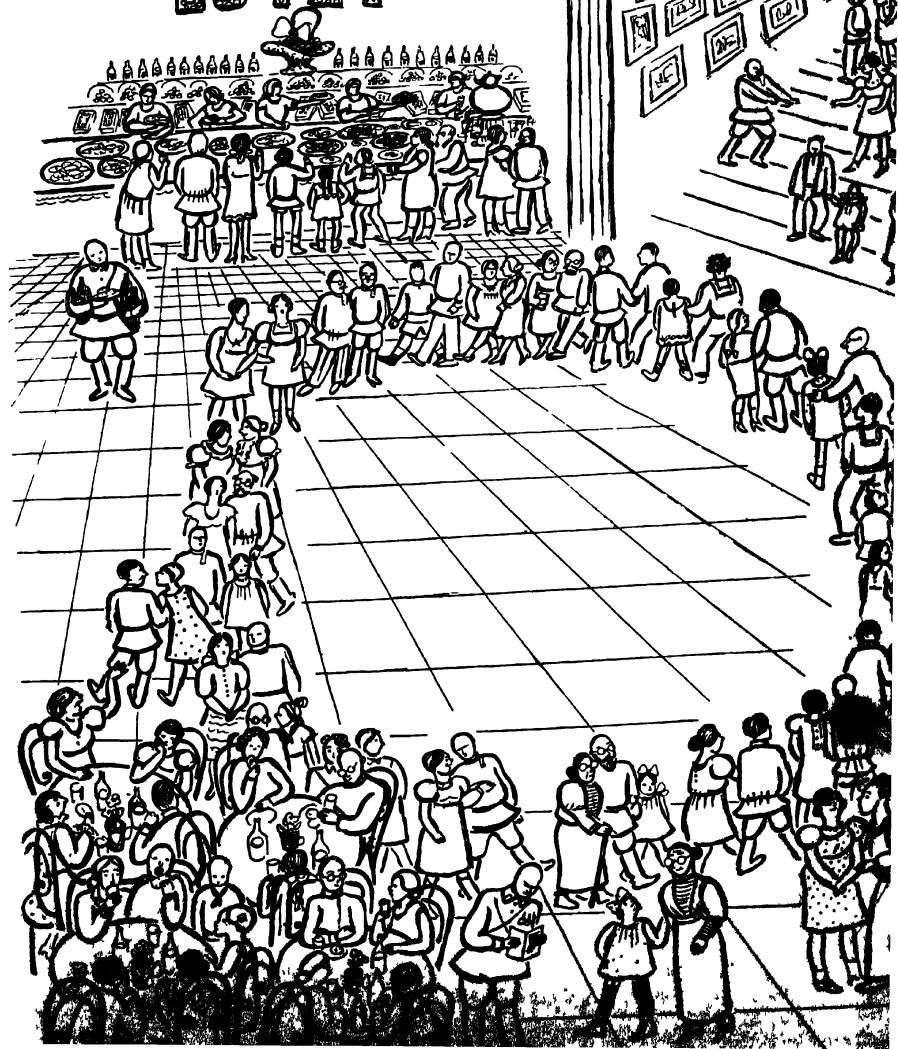
Their new flat on Cerpuchovka had two big rooms. Natasha filled it with furniture she had brought with her from the Kremlin. She slept in a gigantic bed of bird's-eye maple, the head and feet supported by brass nymphs holding out six-branched candelabra. The dressing-table had a heavy marble top, five feet across, and more brass nymphs supported the oval mirror which reflected her untidy litter of perfume bottles and boxes of powder.

A large *petit-point* hunting picture of a brace of dead woodcock, framed in ornate gilt, hung on the wall opposite the window and a framed print of the Medici Venus adorned the other wall. There were no other picture, only a small round photograph of her mother, near her bed.



# БУФЕТ

ТЕАТР →



The children's room was an odd mixture of massive glory from the Kremlin and simple Soviet toys. Irina and Dmitri slept in two small white cots and Dmitri never went to sleep without his brass dog clutched in both hands.

A husky, red-cheeked peasant-girl named Dasha came to look after the household while Natasha went to work every day in the offices of *Pravda*. Dasha had clear blue eyes and a turned-up nose and her straight locks were so fair they looked almost white.

Dasha was just beginning to read and write. She used to practise her pot-hooks with Irina to help her shape the awkward letters. At last the day came when she was able to write a long letter in perfect copperplate to her village.

They ate off a medley of china. Part of an exquisite flower-wreathed porcelain dinner-service from the Kremlin, a broken china cream-jug, stamped with the arms of his Imperial Highness the Tzar Nikolei the Second, cups and saucers with designs of machinery from the first five-year plan, cows and tractors from the Agricultural Drive, and sports girls from KIM, the sports organisation. Those knives and forks not from the Kremlin were of the cheapest white metal which bent at a touch.

Dasha, washing up the strange collection of dishes and silver in the kitchen, sighed to make progress. She was ambitious. She wanted to become a chauffeur. In the meantime she struggled with the kerosene stove, dusted the brass nymphs, and cooked huge quantities of pancakes for breakfast.

Dmitri was almost eleven, the centre of Natasha's life. Strangers who saw them together remarked it was as though she was his sweetheart instead of his mother. Her unrelaxed love and attention developed the lad precociously. He was much cleverer than any of the other boys in his class, and understood many things they could never understand. He accepted his position at home easily and

without unduly dominating, and spent all his time in the company of other boys, playing soldiers. But he wove fantasies about the father he never saw. He wished hard Lenin might have been his father. Or Budyonni.

Somehow there were too many women in the house. Dmitri longed for a man about the place. He often asked Natasha to marry again so that he could have a father. Natasha thought it over. There were two or three men anxious to marry her, but she hesitated. She was hurt that Dmitri was willing to share her with anyone else, for she knew she could never share him with another woman.

The years slipped by. Each May Day they marched in the demonstration . . . Dmitri with his class, Irina with her pioneers, Dasha with her house-workers' trade union, and Natasha with the editorial staff of her newspaper. Each November holidays Natasha baked special little pies in honour of the Revolution. They all read a lot, worked hard, and went to the theatre as often as they could.

\* \* \* \* \*

1934. In the middle of the preparations for May Day Dmitri was suddenly taken ill with appendicitis, rushed to the hospital, and died under the operation.

Natasha's hair turned white within a week. At the funeral Pavel Pavlovitch did not recognise her, so terribly had grief ravaged her features. For days she could not bear to look at Irina, who was alive when Dmitri was dead.

With sad music, followed by a train of weeping friends, all she loved in life, all she cared about in this world, moved slowly in a small white coffin to the crematorium, Natasha abandoned herself completely to her grief. Irina, her own grief poisoned by the

knowledge that her mother would have cared less had it been her, watched over her anxiously. Dasha tried to make her eat. They had to drug her to make her sleep for suicide haunted her day and night.

Without a word and without fuss the organisation where she worked sent her off to the Caucasus for a long holiday. She found a host of friends around her, planning everything for her, smoothing out her daily difficulties, gently helping her life to run on again.

For a whole year Natasha refused to see anyone or go out anywhere except to her daily work. There were only Irina and herself left now. She sent Dasha away and gave up one of her rooms.





They were not a family any more without Dmitri. They lived like two strangers, almost, she and Irina, each cooking her own meals, for their hours of work rarely coincided.

A year passed and May Day again approached. Natasha shrank away from it, shuddering. But a girl in her office insisted on taking her into the streets. Natasha found herself buoyed up by the jubilant crowds, smiling back at the happy young faces under the fluttering banners, clapping her hands as the peasant girls circled, skipping and waving coloured kerchiefs, round their strutting men. She found courage even to look into the faces of the children again, for the first time since Dmitri had been snatched from her.

That was the first step. After that she began to long for crowds and to dread her isolation.

Presently she got another job, in the library of the Mineralogical Institute. It was interesting work. She put effort into her service and became a shock-worker. She allowed herself to become interested in men again, but not whole-heartedly, and when the chance came to heal the wound left by Dmitri's death with another child, she chose to have an abortion instead. She wanted to be faithful to her dead love more than to heal the wound.

\* \* \* \* \*

To-day she still cannot bear the touch of a child's hand. Passion spent, she lives quietly out of the current of active life, doing her job faithfully, reading novels in the evenings, watching the days carry her womanhood away. She is very interested in medicines and pills and keeps more in her store-cupboard than she is ever likely to need.

Dmitri's brass dog stands on her table beneath an enlargement of his photograph.

КМ

Irina is candidate for membership of the Young Communist League. She is already at high school. She will be a doctor or an engineer.

Brother Alexander is studying English for his newspaper job in Leningrad. He is married to a pretty girl, lives on Kirochnaya not far away from where he and Papa went to live after they left Odessa. He works hard in the Party, and has no time for anything else.

Ivan's second family is growing up. In the last list of awards the name of Ivan's second wife appeared. She was granted the order of the Red Banner of Labour for exceptional social work.

Grandpapa is long dead, but Great-aunt Amalia is still alive. She is over seventy. She tells everybody she is fifty-eight.

*Mikhail Ivanovitch*







## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

MIKHAIL IVANOVITCH (MISHA)	a sailor
IVAN PETROVITCH . . .	Misha's father
BERTA LAZAROVNA . . .	Misha's mother
LAZAR DMITROVITCH . . .	Misha's grandfather
ILYA IVANOVITCH . . .	his elder brother
LUDMILLA IVANOVNA . . .	his sister
BORIS IVANOVITCH . . .	his younger brother
GRIGOR LAZAROVITCH . . .	Mother's brother
SERIOSHA } AFONKA } LEV }	Misha's gang
SEMYON . . . . .	a thief (Misha's friend)
SASHA . . . . .	Misha's particular friend at Kronstadt
DOOSIA . . . . .	Misha's first sweetheart
MASHA . . . . .	Misha's sweetheart
MIKHAIL MIKHAILOVITCH . . .	Ludmilla's husband
LEONID MIKHAILOVITCH . . .	Ludmilla's son
BENIA KRIK . . . . .	chief gangster in Odessa
OUTIOSOV . . . . .	Odessa musician
PANIA } TANIA } KATIA } SOFIA YEFIMOVNA }	guests at Ludmilla's party
KOLCHAK . . . . .	counter-revolutionary General
DENIKIN . . . . .	White Interventionist
MARTY . . . . .	French revolutionary leader
VOROSHILOV . . . . .	Commissar for Defence





## *Mikhail Ivanovitch*

**M**ISHA remembered first of all the big wooden bed in the corner of the dark room where he was born. It was the most important thing there. In that bed his parents mated; there his timid gipsy mother gave birth to her three sons and her one daughter; there Ilya and Grandfather were laid out when their time came to die. It was an old bed, full of bugs, like the rest of the building. Every five days his mother took a ewer of boiling water and scalded away the bugs in the wooden bed. Baby Ludmilla helping in this important work one fifth day, overturned the ewer and scalded herself badly. The scar remains on her neck to this day.

Besides the imposing wooden bed, there was one small table and a few rickety chairs. That was all.

Misha's family lived in two dark rooms near the Moldavanka, in Odessa. The rooms were dark because the first room was without a window, and the window in the second room only gave on to a dreary glass porch, some of the panes of which were broken and the rest of which were always covered with a thick layer of grime. In the gloom, amongst the bed bugs, Mikhail's

mother mated with her Ivan and brought forth four fine children.

Misha's father, Ivan Ivanovitch, was a blacksmith. He was a yellow-haired peasant from the Volga German Colony. He wore handsome moustaches, pomaded into a spike at each end, and an embroidered Caucasian cap on the back of his head. His fair hair was parted in the middle and arranged saucily in two flat semi-circles on his forehead. He could neither read nor write. When he went courting Misha's mother, he used to wait faithfully outside the candle factory where she worked, and sometimes he brought her a small gift. Though she was captivated by his moustaches, she had been so strictly brought up that she was too frightened to take him home to her parents.

She was a tiny, dark-eyed woman, with a cunning gipsy smile but full of fears. So they married and went to live in the two dark rooms near the Moldavanka, and in due course Misha and Ilya and Ludmilla and Boris ran about the frowsty courtyard where the unwashed children played about all day in their shirts.

Misha's father being a steady worker, though unskilled, earned thirty to forty roubles a month. Misha was the second son. He was born in 1907, two years after Ilya; Ludmilla was born five years after Misha and Boris three years after Ludmilla.

Besides Father and Mother and the four children, Mother's father lived with them in the two dark rooms. Grandfather Lázar was a very religious old man, who criticised Misha's father severely for his indifference to God. Misha's father always pretended to be too tired to go to church and only allowed his wife to take him there on the most important festival days. Then he would dress carefully in his eight-year-old blue suit, and she would tie on her black lace veil, and arm-in-arm they would pass very slowly through the courtyard, so that all the neighbours should observe them.

It was a happy household, for Father and Mother never quarrelled. The ceremonial dinner set before Father each evening when he came from the smithy was the only meal of the day. Mother cooked bean soup, meat, and pie. In addition Father permitted himself the indulgence of a tiny bottle of vodka. In those days they sold vodka in one-glass bottles. Mother was allowed to dip a piece of bread in Father's vodka and smell it. The children, who knew this was always followed by a recounting of the day's mischief, sat a respectable distance from Father. Father loved the children, and used to beat them regularly for their good.

When Ludmilla was born Misha was there to hear the screams from the big bed and see his father crying, with his face buried in his hands. Misha knew a thing or two already, anyway (because there was a brothel round the corner and the older boys in the courtyard used to boast to him of their knowledge), but without understanding very well because he wasn't very bright.

Considering that they lived in one of the worst neighbourhoods in Odessa, the children might have fallen into worse habits than they did. Father exercised great control over them, and Mother was careful to keep them away from the criminal quarter near the docks. That is why, although they lived only three kilometres from the docks, Misha never saw the sea until he was nearly ten. All the same, Misha's father was proud to shoe the horses for Benia Krik's father, the wagoner. Benia Krik was the swaggering chief of the most powerful gang of criminals in all the teeming Odessa underworld, and everyone was proud to know him.

Misha's father earnestly desired his sons to have some education, for he thought that he might have advanced further himself had he been literate. So, at the age of six, Misha was torn from his hooligan friends in the courtyard and packed off to school.

Misha hated school with all his heart. There were twenty boys

altogether herded into one sweaty wooden room. The droning ogre who instructed them had a precise tariff of punishment. He would beat them with a ruler on their outstretched hands for having inky fingers, and with a flexible cane over stretched trousers on the buttocks, for throwing ink pellets. When the trousers were thick enough to ease the sting they were removed altogether before the flogging started. Wretched little Goethe, the only Jewish boy in the class, was beaten twice as often as anyone else, because he was Jewish.

They were taught reading, and writing from dictation, and arithmetic and patriotic songs.

The indolent elderly priest who came every day to give them religious instruction snored steadily through the lesson. The children, fascinated by the three long hairs protruding from the wart on his right jaw, egged each other on to approach him whilst he slept and cut them off. But even Misha (the boldest hooligan in the class) was not bold enough to attempt this blasphemy, though many was the night he dreamed passionately that he was doing so.

Every day, as soon as school was over, Misha ran home to his mother and asked for a hunk of bread to eat to grow strong.

It was not long after Misha started to go to school that the three-hundredth anniversary of the Romanov dynasty was celebrated. On their best behaviour, for inspectors visited the school in honour of the occasion, Misha and nineteen other boys stood up with their hands clasped behind their backs and roared away at the top of their lungs:

*" Let all our People join, near and afar,  
God Save our Emperor ! Long live our Tzar !  
Great is our Tzar in Peace, greater in War.  
May he be Lord in both, Long Live our Tzar !*

*Boundless his sceptred sway, boundless his might ;  
His power, like Northern day, ne'er sets in night.  
Still, still in beauty shine the Romanov's bright star !  
Blessed be their Royal line. Long live our Tzar !*"

after which each boy received a small paper bag of sweets and a raisin pastry.

Misha was as muscular as a young ox. His tousled curls were close cropped. His transparent blue eyes were set deep in his head and his mouth pouted like a young negro. In the summer-time Misha ran barefoot. He wore a linen shirt and patched short trousers. In the winter a rough hide coat lined with sheep-skin



and a turned-down cap of imitation fur made from cheap thread.

In school he learned as little as possible. He hated the school and he hated the teacher. The lank, unimaginative sadist whom the boys had nicknamed "wooden man" beat them automatically every day, and especially delighted in forcing them to sit for hours on end with their feet in one position. The first boy who ventured to stretch his cramped feet received a stinging blow on the ear.

"Only pigs behave so," exclaimed the teacher, following up the box on the ear by a general cuffing.

But although Misha learned nothing at school, he read every book he could lay his hands on as soon as he was able to read, especially the ragged translations of Sherlock Holmes that came his way. He dreamed of escape from the servitude of school and hoped to become a famous criminal or alternatively a famous detective. These were compensations. There were others too. After school he could run about the dirty courtyard and play *Tyopka* with nuts, and *Tzar's Horses* with the other boys. Also his courtyard friends taught him all the foul words they knew, which were considerable.

On the dark veranda Misha had built himself a little arbour from a couple of old wooden boxes. Here, when the summer evenings grew dark and sultry, Misha used to curl up with a girl of fourteen named Doosia. They had evolved a crude amorous technique. First they would play chasing games. Then when Misha had outstripped her, for he was a better runner than she was, he dragged her to his arbour. There, snugly cuddled together, he used to tell her horrifying stories of Cossack murderers. Doosia loved cold shudders, and surrendered to him with disappointing readiness. Misha, soon weary of his easy conquest, began avoiding her. She pursued him for months.

Father was now promoted to repairing the ironwork of the

Odessa theatre. The family moved half a step higher in the social scale. Every day Misha used to take his father's dinner to the theatre, and sometimes, when there happened to be a *matinée*, Misha was permitted to secrete himself in the wings to watch the performance. So he saw Schiller's *Robbers* and Ostrovski's *Forest*, which so excited him that only fear of displeasing his father prevented him from running away at once in search of adventure.

Misha wasn't at all clever. He was dreamy and disorganised. He liked best being with hooligans and was most at home on the streets. He only managed to get half-way through school, and at the age of eleven he was expelled for inattention and hooliganism. Misha was delighted at this release, but for a whole week too scared to break the news to his father. At last he was obliged to confess what had happened. His mother wept. His father decided to apprentice him at once to a serious trade. It was thought fit that Misha should learn to be a tinsmith.

1917. The newspapers announced that Tzar Nikolei had abdicated. Neighbours who could read told them the news. Misha's mother, as always when anything unusual happened, wept. The ironworkers were all discontented with conditions, Misha's father amongst them. Pay was bad. Food was getting dearer.

Misha's father was soon recruited into Kerensky's army. He thought, as did many other Odessa workers, that this was the real Revolutionary army. He was sent to the Galician front to continue the War. The slogan:

“FIGHT THE GERMANS TO THE END!”

was sounded all over Odessa. Misha's mother wept and wept. She didn't understand what the War was about, and she had nothing against the Germans. Her husband himself was a Volga German. But her sobs were drowned in general hysteria. Misha

ran with the crowds to watch Kerensky when he spoke at a giant mass meeting near the circus. The crowd carried him shoulder high in an armchair, madly cheering the defender of democracy.

One fine day Father suddenly returned from the front in a droshky. Misha saw him coming, sitting bolt upright, dirty and bearded, in the jolting carriage. Misha ran in to tell his mother. Immediately all the neighbours came flocking in and that evening they crammed both the rooms to hear Father's stories. It was very simple. After two days he had got to the Galician front, through a lot of shelling. When he got there he found the October Revolution had begun, the front already breaking up, and all the soldiers going home. They were simply not going on fighting the Germans. They all wanted to get back to their wives and children. They wanted peace. Misha, eyes swollen from lack of sleep, managed to stay up till midnight that night in order not to miss any of Father's exciting stories, and all the strange new words he had brought home with him about the *Reds*, the *Commissars*, the *Bolsheviks*, whatever *they* were.

Father, first of all joining the Trade Union, started to work at his old job in the theatre again. Mother couldn't understand what it was all about but she was glad to have her husband back. Meanwhile she took the precaution of hiding his Trade Union card in case the Tzar returned suddenly.

And now Misha really began his apprenticeship. His father brought him there one morning and handed him over, telling the tinsmith to be sure to make a good worker out of him, and not to spare the rod when necessary for Misha's education. The tinsmith worked in a fetid basement. From the very beginning Misha hated the darkness and the tedium. He longed to work in a factory instead, and loitered every day on his way to his work outside a big factory where engines were being repaired, fascinated by the noise.



Misha's new boss didn't work himself. He owned the smithy. For a long time Misha was not taught anything, only to clear up, do odd jobs for the boss's wife, and sweep the factory. Soon the other workers began to take him out with them on jobs, repairing corrugated iron roofs. Misha liked this better. He sat high up among the houses in the sunshine, watching the people walking about below, and reading snatches of adventure stories surreptitiously, when the foreman wasn't looking.

On the whole he was treated rather better than most of the apprentices. He didn't have to eat and sleep on the premises like the others, because the tinsmith was in the same courtyard where they lived. On the other hand he had to do all the dirty work for the boss's wife. Especially did Misha resent having to look after her baby. The boss's wife was a tall, desperately ugly woman with very short sight. Misha hated her squalling baby with a blind and savage hate. He would have beaten it had he dared.

The foreman of the tinworkers was a bulky man with red hair. There was supposed to be an understanding that he was to marry the boss's spinster sister, but Misha soon spotted that the boss's wife was sweet on him herself. When she prepared the indifferent midday meal of coarse cabbage soup for the chief workers, she always managed, despite her short-sightedness, to single out titbits for the red-haired lover.

Misha was consumed with rage, at the wretched baby for howling from morning till night, at the red-haired man for allowing himself to be seduced by a vixen, at the cuckold boss for beating his apprentices every day, and at the adulterous boss's wife, who was so short-sighted that she spent hours each day in the market, brooding over cheap vegetables for the soup in order to distinguish what she was buying.

Intervention. Odessa, despite its gangrenous slums, contained

many small traders and middle-class people. When the Revolution was attacked by foreign intervention, many were openly pleased. Misha, always at hand when there was anything doing, wriggled near the front of the crowd to watch the arrival of Denikin, surrounded by White officers, saluting obsequiously.

To Misha it looked as though Odessa was swarming with different uniforms; French soldiers, English soldiers, Whites, and Germans. He had no idea what it was all about but darted here and there as often as he could escape from his mother's watchful eye.

He picked up a couple of leaflets he had found in the streets. They were not in Russian at all. Misha couldn't even make out the shape of the letters, and he had no idea what the language was. Mother understood even less what they were about, but to be on the safe side she hid them with Father's Trade Union card.

WHY DID YOU COME TO RUSSIA,  
ALLIED SOLDIERS ?

WHY SHOULD WORKMEN OF FRANCE AND  
ENGLAND MURDER THEIR FELLOW-  
WORKERS OF RUSSIA ?

DO YOU WANT TO DESTROY OUR  
WORKERS' REPUBLIC ?

DO YOU WANT TO RESTORE THE  
TZAR ?

You are fighting for the Bondholders  
of France, the land-grabbers of  
England, the Imperialists of  
America.

Why shed blood for them ?

WHY DON'T YOU GO HOME ?

## **WHY HAVE YOU VOLUNTEERED TO COME TO RUSSIA ?**

**WHY ?** Is it that you like **WAR** so much ? Do you enjoy this rolling in mud and blood ? Do you get satisfaction from seeing mangled bodies ? You claim to be the representatives of a civilised race ! Is this how you propose to bring civilisation into Russia ?

—Or is it that you feared being out of work and came to Russia as a form of employment ? Were you tempted by the increased pay and extra rations ? If that is so——

It is strange employment for men who have just finished a War for “lasting peace.”

**PROBABLY** you were induced by the lies circulated by the capitalist press about the anarchy and terror prevailing in Russia.

**PROBABLY** you have been induced to believe that Bolsheviks are devils who must be destroyed, in order that the peace of the world may be secured. If that is so, we are convinced that when you learn the truth about Russia, you too will refuse to be the executioners of the Russian people—just like the British troops you replaced in the Caucasus and foreign troops in other parts who have refused.

**YOU** are simply the tools of the capitalists and landlords in your countries who have sent you here to “punish” the Russian workers and peasants for having dared to revolt against their oppressors.

The land and wealth of Russia now belong to the working people of Russia.

Without your aid the counter-revolution would have been suppressed long ago. The Russian people would have long ago had the opportunity of developing their agriculture and industry.

## **YOU ARE WORKING MEN TOO !**

What interests have you in fighting for the gang of Russian counter-revolutionaries and international capitalists ?

As working men your business should be to support your fellow-workers in those places where they succeed in taking power, for the victory of the workers in one country is a step towards the emancipation of the workers in all countries.

In fighting the Russian workers you are scabbing.

Your fellow-workers at home, knowing the real reason of your being sent here, are preparing a general strike against intervention in Russia.

**COMRADES !** It is dirty work you are doing. Have the courage to pitch it. Do not let it be said that English working men were so mean and contemptible as to suppress their own fellow-workers for the sake of a little extra money and food !

**Comrades ! Don't SCAB !**

**Stand by your class in the great World Movement for the Emancipation of Labour.**

One day, early in the morning, Odessa was rent by a terrific noise like thunder. Ammunition dumps were exploding. People running madly in all directions. Rumours got about that burglars had burned down the great house of Ptashnikov, the wealthy cloth merchant. There was a general panic. Pious old Jews knelt praying in their dark, dank basements by the light of a single candle. Guards were on duty in the Square. At home Mother cried.

The Germans left and the French soldiers entered Odessa. Misha loved them, especially the Zouaves. He used to strut behind them proudly whenever they marched through the streets. In the harbour, American, English and French gunboats crowded the port, menacingly. Misha could no longer be restrained from the waterside.



A capsized boat lay under the water of the port, her bridge above the water-line. Here the boys used to lie out all day in the sunshine, dropping into the water to bathe and popping out again to laze on the bridge. Misha learned to swim when one of the boys threw him into deep water. He swam. With a crowd of other dirty urchins, he used to dive for the kopecks that the English sailors flung in the water. Misha had a weakness for the water and for boats. He liked the English boats best because they were the biggest.

When the theatre where Misha's father worked was nationalised, Misha's father was made property man.

Bread was already becoming scarce. The street boys began begging from the American ships in the port. The theatre of Odessa mobilised its orchestra of sixty and its twenty stage-hands to send an expedition to the villages to requisition food. Misha's father led them. There were many wealthy peasants who put up armed resistance, and before help arrived there was a long battle in which many were wounded. But in the end the expedition returned triumphantly with several wagons of bread and geese. Twenty geese at once were thrown into great cookers and the soup and meat were shared out equally amongst all, the children first.

First the Reds occupied Odessa, then the Whites. Then the Reds again. Then the Whites again. Father was a Red guard and very militant. Mother trembled and hid in terror when the Whites swept back, fearing lest Father might be denounced.

As the Whites pressed closer, the Odessa workers themselves organised the defence of the city. In each house a group of five or six armed workers united to form a cell. Misha's father was made the head of the cell in their house. One day they heard shooting outside the gate of their courtyard. Father stole to the gate.

"Who is there?" he demanded in a loud voice.

"We'll break the damn gates down, you sons of bitches, if you don't open at once!"

A terrific banging on the gates followed, the heavy wood quivering under the blows. Father and his assistant guard Shura broke open the door themselves before it gave way. Outside reeled fifteen White-guard officers, all blind drunk.

Misha's father, who had no arms but a gun, threatened to throw a bomb, whilst Shura, concealed behind the gatepost, fired off his rifle in the air. The White guards made off on unsteady legs as fast as they could. Mother meanwhile prayed and trembled in the corner.

Despite the efforts of the Red guards to preserve order, things got worse and worse in Odessa. As food became scarcer, more violent burglary broke out. Benia Krik was the most important person in Odessa. Hold-ups, bank robberies and outrages happened every day, and the Moldavanka was just as dangerous to pass through in the daytime as at night.

The Odessa workers, though they had no uniforms and hardly any firearms, hastily mobilised their own militia. Street shooting. Mother, returning from market one morning with her pitifully empty string bag, dragged Misha hurriedly indoors. Misha, peeping through a crack in the courtyard gate, saw a big bald chap in a blue suit and yellow boots with a portfolio under one arm and a huge Mauser under the other tearing madly down the narrow street pursued by militiamen. At every few steps he stopped, took aim, fired, and panted off again. Misha wriggled out of the house and ran after the militia. Near the circus a crowd of people had gathered. In the middle the bald fellow was lying huddled up, blood streaming from a wound in his stomach, but still grasping the portfolio from which packets of money were scattered and gold coins rolling all over the street.

Five well-dressed burglars had entered one of the banks, gagged and bound the bank clerks, and seized all the money. In escaping with their loot one had been killed, one had been caught and one escaped. The other two held the bank against the militia. This dead lump was the one who had escaped.

Inflation. The streets piled up with neglected filth. Everywhere posters pasted up, Red posters and White posters. Many Odessa people couldn't read but the pictures were lurid enough. Wild rumours gained more credence than all the posters. In the ramshackle cafés of the docks the street boys and pimps beat out new songs and everybody sang them, the Greeks, the Turks, the negroes, and all the shifty eddies of the dockside. Sometimes the street songs pilloried the Whites.

*" Street, my little street !  
Shake in your shoes Denikin  
For the Moscow Cheka  
Have cashed old Kolchak into small change."*

Often scabrous, always joyous, these doggerel rhymes spread their rainbow colours all over the waterfront. Outiosov, strumming his guitar at *Fanconi's*, emerged from this welter of dirt and music, rhythm singing in his head and breaking through his clever fingers.

*" I know, boys, how to grin,<sup>1</sup>  
I know how to roar with laughter,<sup>2</sup>  
I know how to juggle,  
I know how to turn your pockets inside out."*

All that hot summer, in the dusty evening streets of Odessa, while the Civil War raged, the pickpockets harvested and were in

<sup>1</sup> (steal)

<sup>2</sup> (distract attention)

born picked by their pimps and cleverer thieves than themselves. Benia Krik swaggered about the city, and the irrepressible boys and girls danced outside the flyblown eating-houses, circling sedately in twos, arms raised above their heads; advancing, skipping, turning in circles again. They lifted their voices, and sang to the whine of accordions, Outiosov's latest song about the inflation.

*"Lemons, my lemons !  
Where do you grow ?  
In what orchard may you be plucked ?  
Lemons, my lemons !  
You are growing on Sonia's balcony."*

The Odessa theatre changed hands from the Reds to the Whites again and again. The same troop of actors acted first for one side and then for the other side. When the Whites took possession they put on erotic cabarets, and when the Reds took possession they put on Red propaganda.

One day Father didn't return home for two whole days. Distracted they searched everywhere. There had been a big street battle, and Odessa was strewn with corpses. The hospital where Mother finally discovered him, was next door to the big house where the Whites had held their secret Cheka. A Red notice pinned up on the doorposts invited everyone to come and see for themselves how the Whites had conducted their trials. Misha ran in pop-eyed. All had been left untouched, blood-stained instruments on the floor, and blood spattered on all the walls. Misha was thrilled.

Father had been badly wounded in the leg by a shell. He was weeks recovering. There was no food in the house. No money.



Mother wanted to try to find work to tide over the bad times, but Father was offended at this idea.

"I took you from the factory when I married you, Berta Lazarovna," he said in a firm voice that admitted of no more argument, "it is not right that you should go back."

Undermined by hunger, Mother and Misha and Ilya all succumbed to typhoid before Father was up and about. Only Grandfather, Ludmilla, and baby Boris escaped. The amateur hospital was understaffed and ill-supplied with food. Despite the bitter cold it was totally unheated. Mother and Father were obsessed by the thought that they might both die, leaving no one to look after the four children.

Misha, however, was strong. Within a few days he was up and helping to serve the other patients, in return for which they allowed him a little more food. Ilya, not so strong as Misha, was ill in another ward and did not recover so easily. Misha carried his food to him to the next ward where he lay. When they were all well enough to be discharged, their dirty threadbare clothes were returned to them, and they crawled out into the streets of Odessa again to go home.

Now it was Misha who was overcome with a hopeless feeling of weakness and desolation as they slowly walked home. Helpless. That was how he felt. He had never felt like that before. He had been brave as only the physically strong can be brave; thoughtlessly, without understanding fear. Now he began to understand fear. It is when you don't know what to do.

Winter and famine. No food at all. Prices soaring. Nothing to eat anywhere. Wild rumours that food was to be had in all manner of strange places. People said there was plenty of bread to be got in Kiev. It was just transport, they said, that was disorganised.

So one day Misha's father put his embroidered cap on the back of his head, took a sack in his hand and went out to get himself to Kiev to procure bread for his family. They never heard of him again. He disappeared completely, like a chalk mark on a slate wiped out with a wet sponge.

Now Mother, though not wishing to disobey her husband, was forced to seek work. The factories were all idle. Misha, thirteen already, had no boots to his feet and could not go out in the snow. Mother earned a few kopecks carrying water for richer people, as the waterpipes had broken down all over Odessa. The streets were absolutely deserted.

The family of Mother, the four children and Grandfather lived on thin gruel. The big wooden bed had to be broken up to provide firewood for the icy rooms. The few sticks of furniture they sold, one at a time, to wandering gipsies. The winter grew colder and colder. Ilya went out to look for work and was brought home frozen. He died within a few days.

And then Grandfather died. There was no coffin for him. There was no wood to hammer together a coffin. All the wood had been used to kindle the bit of fire that was keeping the rest of them alive. They sewed Grandfather in an old sack and, with super-human efforts, hacked a hole in the stiffened earth to lay him in.

Now there was only the four of them left and Misha was the eldest. Mother's brother Grigor came one day and talked with Misha gravely.

"You are the eldest, Mikhail Ivanovitch. You are now the breadwinner."

But Misha's head was in a whirl. He couldn't understand anything. His mother was too stricken to cry any more. She thought things would never improve. She gathered together all her little strength to battle for the two or three hundred grammes

of maize each day, for thin gruel that was just keeping them alive.

Gradually the awful winter flogged itself out, and the spring they were all yearning for, began to emerge.

\* \* \* \* \*

With the approach of summer a few vegetables began to appear on the market. The situation improved slightly. But the factories were in ruins, and wreckers were at work in all the organisations that still continued. Disaffected clerks were cooking accounts, Whites were stealing from all the stores.

Misha was only conscious of one desire. To put food in his belly. His hunger gnawed him so ardently that he could think of nothing else. He started to haunt the port as soon as the weather was warm enough to get about barefoot. He was a clumsy thief but hunger gave him skill. He used to tie up the legs of his trousers and cram them with stolen grain, pilfered through the interstices of the wagons, which were taking the food cargo from the unloading boats. Every pocketful meant a bite to eat. It seemed to him that he was not a boy any more at all, but just a belly screaming for food.

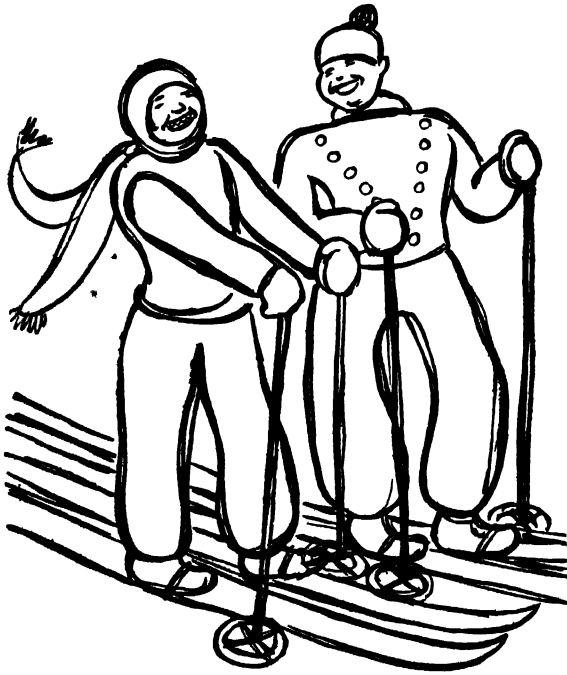
The intervention was still in force. The harbour was alive with boats of many nationalities. Misha went begging with the other boys from the foreign sailors. They sometimes threw a piece of bread or a tin of condensed milk into the harbour, to be dived for. Like a fish Misha cut into the clear water and tore frenziedly after the prize.

There was unrest amongst the French boats. Marty was organising a mutiny. Every night there were meetings and demonstrations of the sailors on the French gunboats. And presently the French Fleet was withdrawn from the port.

Misha was back again working at the hated tinsmith's. Mother hired herself out as a servant whenever she could get a day's work. So they lived for three years. All that time Misha's boss, egged on by the bad-tempered wife, was beating him and beating him. And one day, Misha, furious at the last beating, stood up with murder blazing in his blue eyes and blurted out what he knew about the boss's wife and the red-haired foreman.

That night the boss had a terrible row with his wife, and the next morning the boss beat Misha specially hard with a metal rod.

There happened to be a new workman, working at the tinsmith's. He had just returned from the Civil War, and was a



Communist, although Misha didn't know anything about that. He was always kind to Misha, and persuaded the boy to go to the Metal Workers' Union. Misha went to the Trade Union and told his story. In a few days a representative of the Trade Union came to the tinsmith's and called out both Misha and the boss. Misha repeated his story before them both. The boss flew into an awful temper, shouting:

"Don't tell lies you good-for-nothing son-of-a-bitch . . . I've always been kind to you and treated you well, you bastard. Your father left you in my charge, you radish ! I'll treat you as I wish."

Misha insisted that he would sooner die of starvation than work there any longer. The boss was fined heavily for ill-treating his apprentice. He sacked Misha immediately. Misha went straight to the Trade Union to report. The Union representative paid the boss another visit and obliged him to pay Misha a month's wages. He also helped Misha to get another job at another tinsmith's down the street.

Misha's mother went to the boss and wept. She had words with Misha over the affair, insisting that the boss was right, in the first place because he was older than Misha, and in the second place because he was the boss. But Misha would not budge. He hated bosses. It was in his bones.

And now all the smithies closed down for lack of work. There was great unemployment all over Russia. In Odessa alone there were 45,000 workers without jobs, and Odessa was largely a town of petty traders and shopkeepers. Misha, like the other unemployed workers, went on the dole. One kilo of black bread per day and his dinner. The dinner he wolfed, the kilo of black bread he brought home. His mother was still working as odd-job servant. It was a dreary time. He and his friends hung around the port,

swimming, pickpocketing, scrounging, idling, watching the foreign boats come and go. They longed to get away somewhere exciting on one of these ships. Many of them went to Port Said from Odessa, and many carried cargoes of poor Jews to Palestine.

Misha hung about the waterfront with his own especial gang of hooligans. They loved each other dearly, addressed each other by cherished nicknames and were inseparable. Misha was the oldest but Seriosha became the leader because he had the most brains. Seriosha was Jewish. He was four years younger than Misha and the son of a military doctor. His family had been well-to-do, and he had had a good education. He was thin, wiry and active. Strong-willed as an eagle, he would brook no interference. He fought with Misha for the leadership and won easily; Misha had splendid muscles but Seriosha had better brains. Misha could always be overpowered by the will in Seriosha's commanding eyes, which changed from grey to green, like a cat at night-time. Seriosha had fine teeth, a smile full of charm when he was pleased, and a profile as clear-cut and imperious as Napoleon.

There was Afonka, a tall, skinny lout with a chalk-white face and carrotty hair, which no one ever saw because he always kept his cap pulled well over his eyes. Then there was Lev, swarthy, short, heavily-muscled and round-shouldered like a bison. He had an immense forehead, a hooked nose and a big wart on his left cheek.

Afonka's mother was never at home because she was having an affair with the watchman in the next street, and spent her time there, laughing and drinking with him, all day long, and every night. So the gang took possession of Afonka's mother's room on the Moldavanka.

It was a foul little attic, unswept and windowless. Every night, after their petty stealings and misadventures of the day, the gang

gathered there secretly, and by the light of a bit of candle poured over a tattered map Seriosha had stolen from the quayside. They made marvellous plans to stowaway in one of the boats.

They were all barefoot and ragged. Not one of them had a kopeck. And Afonka had a sweetheart named Tania who was an added disadvantage. But they swore obedience and eternal fidelity over the bit of candle, drawing blood from themselves with a pin to seal the oath. Every night they worked out plans for adventure abroad and every night they sang their song.

It was a mournful sentiment that Seriosha had picked up from one of the sailors. They loved it. Seriosha would start in his clear treble, and the other three would join in, dragging out the wailing notes with the utmost satisfaction :

*" A candle beams with a gleaming light,  
Silent the sailors sleep.  
Ship goes full speed  
Hear the engines tick-tock, tick-tock.*

*The youngest sailor  
Bows his head on his breast  
Longing for his Fatherland,  
He cannot sleep. Poor boy !*

*Tell me mother dear,  
Why did you bring me into this world ?  
Why did you give me a sailor's uniform ?  
O, why did you give me a sailor's uniform ? "*

For years after Misha could never hear this song without tears; it brought back the shadowy attic, the lightning eyes of Seriosha, the battered gang of down-at-heel brigands in their early teens,

all yearning to escape from the wretchedness and monotony of Odessa, to a bright shore somewhere where there was plenty of food and excitement. And all the time the Civil War was raging around them. All the time more excitement, more danger, more heroism, more adventure, was thundering about Odessa than their wildest thoughts could have conceived; and they knew not a thing about it.

\* \* \* \* \*

There were two boats in the dock just then. The *Chicherin* and the *Ilyitch*. Seriosha and Lev stowed away on the *Ilyitch*. Misha and Afonka smuggled themselves on to the *Chicherin*. Both the boats were bound for Palestine.

It was after nightfall when they sneaked aboard, their only luggage a lump of black bread which they divided exactly between the two of them. Coal loading was finished and a G.P.U. official was already examining documents, when Misha slipped on board behind a burly stoker, and wriggled himself into the hole.

There was not much room there. He had arranged with Afonka to give a low whistle after twenty minutes if everything was all right, and then Afonka would sneak on board too. Misha, cramped in the hole, decided to go out into the first-class and hide in one of the lifeboats. He was caught just as he was pursing up his lips to whistle for Afonka. The commandant of the port cross-examined him, cursed him not unsympathetically and let him go. The *Chicherin* sailed off without them.

Now Misha was in a frenzy to go to sea. He haunted the port, imploring the sailors and all the officials he could find to let him go. No luck. No one wanted him. In the meantime, the other two boys who had stowed away on the *Ilyitch* returned after two



months. They had managed to escape detection by mixing with the passengers who were all as shabby as they were, and they had actually got as far as Jaffa before they were discovered. They were excited by their voyage but not at all impressed with Palestine, which they said was like a waste land and they were taken aback by the curtness of the English officials there.

So Misha was still drumming his heels on the quayside in Odessa, without a ship, without a job.

Seriosha, precociously developed for his age, was rather sweet on Ludmilla, who was already a long-legged girl of twelve, very pretty and quite aware of her charms. Misha used to beat Ludmilla regularly for hanging around with the boys, but he never suspected that Seriosha had a weakness for her. He used to beat both Ludmilla and young Boris, because he was the head of the family and it was his duty to chastise them regularly, as his father had chastised him, as a prophylactic measure. Misha was seventeen already, a big awkward lad; rough, especially with those he loved, and unable to express himself in any way except by a physical demonstration of force.

And now the Soviet Government started reconstruction. Reparation work on the docks was begun and all the unemployed of the waterside leapt into work thankfully. Misha and his gang all got work there at once, and worked hard, thankful to be doing something again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Misha's job was loading and unloading provisions on the dockside from the boats into trucks. Meat, cheeses, smetana. All day he worked in the sunshine stretching and straining his fine muscles, growing sunburnt and superbly healthy.

It was summer time. The sea had never looked bluer. The grass had never looked greener. The flowers had never smelt so sweet to Misha before. He had a job. He was a stevedore. His mother was pleased with him. His family was in better circumstances; Mother didn't have to go out to work any more, there was enough food for the four of them. They had clothes and even shoes to wear. And to crown it all he fell in love.

Now Misha, even when he was in proper work, could never resist the temptation to consort with hooligans. His new friend was a clever crook named Semyon, an ingenious thief who squandered his loot on vodka and the loose girls of the waterfront. Misha, always impressed by a smart rogue, used to go swimming with Semyon and listened half-tempted to his stories.



One hot summer night the two boys, returning from the cool beach, wandered up Politskaya Street, and at the corner of house No. 38 (Misha never forgot that number all his life) there was a group of girls. They were lounging about in languid attitudes, chattering and giggling. Semyon greeted them with casual bravado.

When Misha set eyes on Masha he felt that a knife had struck him through the heart and thought he would die. She was standing quietly in the gateway, her arms folded warmly on her bosom, looking at nothing in particular, with her head on one side. Upright, and thrust forward, her body was in the first flowering of adolescence. Her waist was small. Her shoulders undeveloped. Her young breasts protruded like growing fruit beneath the thin flowered cotton of her sarafan. ' \* '

She was dark, dark. Her skin gleamed golden as copper, her eyes melted like black velvet and she stared disconcertingly through the black silken fringe over her eyes, not always at you. She had a pretty voice, and wrinkled her nose when she laughed in a way that turned Misha's insides over exquisitely. She was not quite sixteen. Her father was a hunchbacked tailor. Her mother was dead. She read cheap novels and had very romantic ideas.

For several days after this encounter Misha was too stirred to seek her out again. Clumsily, he made efforts to find out something about her from other people, trying not to let them suspect his real interest. Everybody knew Masha. They said she read a lot of books, that she admired rough strong lads, and that she was supposed to be in love with Semyon. Misha turning over these crumbs in his mind, kept away from Politskaya, although he thought of absolutely nothing else but the doorway of Number 38.

It so happened one glittering July day that he was about to go  
MM

swimming from a borrowed boat. Arms stretched above his head, he was just ready to dive into the water when he saw a familiar figure on the beach. It was Masha, head on one side as usual, arms clasped over her bosom. Misha dived, came up spouting, shook himself and performed a whole series of difficult fancy dives. All the time Masha was watching from the beach, head on one side. Was she looking at him? He couldn't make out.

By and by Semyon came along and she went away with him.

The next night Misha's mother sent him with a message to her sister-in-law, Uncle Grigor's wife, who lived at 41 Politskaya.



Misha got no further than No. 38, for there in the doorway stood Masha. He stopped dead as though paralysed. They began talking. They talked for two hours. Misha asked her to go to the pictures with him. He had forgotten all about the message. They went to the pictures. For several nights this process repeated itself. After that, for six whole months he stood with her in the Square every night from seven until midnight. And every night after she left him she went to Semyon who stood on no ceremony with any girl. Semyon was vain about his successes with women. He was illiterate, although like Seriosha he came from a rich family. He was a marvellous thief, born to no good and only true to his friends. With women he was quite ruthless. He had only one use for them and never wasted a minute. Semyon cared much more for his friendship with Misha than for all the girls of the water-front. But he felt it was wrong to let Misha harbour these dangerous illusions about the virtue of women.

"They are all the same, these girls," he warned Misha, pursing his lips into an ugly shape. "You can have any one of them if you go about it the right way, you radish. I take all I want . . . it's because I don't care about them, that they let me do as I want with them."

Semyon, as he said, treated all girls indifferently, taking what he wanted and snapping his fingers at their caprices. But Misha was deeply in love and paid no attention to his friend's warnings. Semyon swore to Misha that Masha made too free with her charms. Misha denied it hotly, calling out the deepest oath of the water-front, to prove his devotion.

"If you can take Masha," he swore tensely, "if you can take Masha, you may spit in my face."

At last, on Semyon's advice, Misha, after leaving Masha at midnight with his usual formal handshake, one night turned back

and followed her. True enough she presently met Semyon and greeted him. Aching with misery, Misha stumbled after them through the Park. Behind an outhouse Semyon carelessly threw the girl down. She offered no resistance. Misha fled home like a maniac, blinded with rage and despair. All night he wept, writing madly in his diary of the anger boiling up in him.

When he next met Masha, it seemed to him that she avoided his eyes. He sat speechless for half an hour, then seized her by the wrist, drew out his clasp-knife and cried hoarsely: "You are nothing but a common prostitute!" and at the same moment knew that he was powerless to touch her, realised that he longed to embrace her. Masha, true to her romantic novels, fell on her knees and begged for mercy. Misha threw her aside and fled, ashamed of his weakness.

So it went on for months. He couldn't live without her. He sought her out constantly. She protested that she loved him. He tried to believe her. And Semyon came by and she followed him. The truth was that she was a strongly sexed girl. Had Misha held her firmly she might have been faithful to him, but Misha was in love with her and afraid to touch her. He resolved to give her up. And for a whole month avoided her like poison.

What is the use of earning one hundred roubles a month when you are unhappy? He gave his mother sixty and had the whole forty left over. He pined to be with Masha, to spend his forty roubles on Masha, to buy Masha flowers, and crisp white dresses, to show off her gleaming skin. But he shunned her. And skulked about the cafés in a vain attempt to drown his misery. To avoid Masha he had to avoid most of his other friends too, for she was a fine swimmer and very popular on the beach.

One night he stumbled into Semyon in one of the drinking dens he had taken to frequenting. Semyon held out his hand, swore

that no woman was worth breaking a friendship for, and dragged Misha off to the Café Fanconi, the most elegant restaurant in Odessa, where amongst the street arabs, peddling sweet-smelling bunches of roses, expensive prostitutes and their pimps surreptitiously plied their trade. Misha, half drunk, bought a bunch of pink roses from one of the boys on the terrace. He and Semyon wandered off down the street together. At the corner amongst a crowd of girls was Masha.

With drunken solemnity, Misha began presenting a rose from his bunch to each of the girls. The last five he threw over Masha. Piqued, she pushed them from her, and said Misha was drunk. A quarrel started. Misha threw off his linen jacket and struck her with it. Masha screamed. Misha suddenly made a rush at her (whom he had not dared to touch in love) and began hitting her hard on the neck, in the face, everywhere. In a moment, the whole group of girls was running amok. Semyon disappeared in the mêlée. Misha, half crazed with alcohol and excitement, started to run madly in a zigzag. He ran and ran through the warm starlit darkness, through many streets, through the Park. For a second he thought he saw Masha there, but it was another girl, a stranger. He ran on, gasping in jerky gasps, like a drowning man thrown by an overpowering wave on the shingle.

At daybreak he woke up to find himself on a bench in Polit-skaya Square. His head ached horribly and he was overcome by a flooding sense of shame. He had very little memory of what had happened the night before, but wanted urgently to make it up with Masha. He crawled home like a sick dog. Mother met him on the doorstep, scolding him for his terrible behaviour, taking Masha's part. He slunk off to work and worked all through the heat of the day without stopping, unloading great packages of salt. In the evening Mother still scolded him.

Wretched, Misha sat down and with a great effort wrote Masha a letter. She ignored it.

A month later he got a job at a locksmith's where he earned even better wages. He spent all his spare time out in a boat alone. He was out alone in a fishing boat when he saw Masha again, arms crossed on her breasts as usual, amongst a crowd of his friends. One of them called to him and challenged him to row the twelve of them. Could he? Of course he could. This time Misha strained every muscle to row strongly and easily. He stole a glance at Masha who was looking sideways at him under her shining black fringe.

Afterwards, when the others had gone away she stayed behind in the boat. Misha began to row right out to sea. They spoke no word. He pulled the oars with long steady strokes, his heart pumping madly. Far out at sea Misha dived over the edge. Silently, as a dog performs his antics, Misha in the clear water went humbly through all the tricks he knew. Masha lay in the boat, watching him silently through her narrow black eyes. He clambered back into the boat, shook himself like a wet dog and sat down beside her, without a word. Now he knew that she would one day be his. He was very happy and asked no more than that. The boat drifted for a long time, Misha letting the water slip through his big hands in quiet ecstasy. Misha went home blissfully happy, in love with the whole world.

It was already 1929 and Misha was eligible for military service. He was called before the Red Army Commission, and on his earnest plea, sent to do his training in the Red Fleet. Misha was delighted, thrilled and a little sad at the same time to be going away from his home and Masha.

All was a frantic rush before he left. The first thing he did was to visit one of the sailors' hang-outs he knew on the waterside, to



have an anchor and a seascape tattooed all along his right arm, and a gentleman acrobat balancing a lady on his left arm.

His farewell party was attended by all the Odessa toughs, all his workmates, and all the boys and girls from round about. The party lasted two weeks without stopping, and there was heavy drinking, and plenting of knocking about, for Odessa was giving him a send-off after her own heart. And three days before he left, late at night he took Masha to the Park. She gave herself to him at last. Misha was so overwhelmed by the excitement and anguish of going away, that it was all blurred for him. He hardly realised what was happening. Three days later he boarded the freight truck which was to take him to Kronstadt to train for the Red Navy. The first part of his life was over.

\* \* \* \* \*

There were five hundred lads on the train, all bound for Lenin-grad to join the Baltic Fleet. It was a gay journey. They sang till their voices were hoarse. Then they danced on the roof of the moving train until they were exhausted. Then they sang again.

At the station a band met them with brave music. It was sunset. The great harbour glowed and burned in a shimmering expanse of waters. They marched to the headquarters of the *Baltisko Flotski Ekipage*, passing sunburned sailors in uniform on the way. Misha could hardly swallow from excitement.

"Where do you wish to go?" Misha was asked at the vocational examination, and like all the five hundred boys he said he didn't know and, on being pressed, said eagerly that he would like to be an engineer in the machine-room.

"Why not study to be an electro-technician?" suggested the



examiner with a smile. . . . "That is a good trade afterwards, you know."

And the very next evening Misha and his four hundred and ninety-nine companions went off to Kronstadt. Again they were met with music. Misha had never seen anything so clean in his life as his spotless cubicle with its snow-white bed. He looked over his equipment, dazed by so much glory, fingered the strong linen sheets as lovingly as a housewife and counted over again and again the summer underwear, the winter underwear, the towels and the overalls, the different suits, shoes, overcoats and jackets. He put on the little round hat with the long ribbons and stared at himself in the mirror with awed delight. That night he gave himself to sleep like an exhausted child, a long glorious dreamless sleep.

Next day work began in earnest. The lads rose at six, tidied their cubicles, did their jerks, and studied until midday. Three times every day they ate delicious food, good Rassolnik and Borsht, cutlets and kasha, compôte, rice à l'impératrice, and actually butter with their black bread. There was even white bread, too, on the table if you wanted it. After the midday meal an hour of relaxation, then more lessons for two hours and after six freedom for the rest of the day.

In the Red Corner, Misha found treasures of books and newspapers. He read voraciously, everything he could get hold of, but especially Jack London and Maxim Gorki. Misha found himself working on the editorial board of the wall-newspaper *Zalp* within the week. True, he didn't spell so well, but most of the other lads were barely literate. Misha, happy as a lark, started to ski, joined the dramatic circle, learned to play the bugle in the band, and plunged headlong into the complications of radio signalling. What remained of his free time he spent in the sports ground and he tumbled into bed every night at the prescribed hour of eleven, tired out, blissfully happy, with no thought of women whatever, neither Masha nor anybody else. It was a good life. It was his University.

A letter from home, in Ludmilla's awkward handwriting. Mother was heartbroken without him but happy that he was doing well. She was working in a sewing factory. Ludmilla wrote that Seriosha was paying her a lot of attention and had got her a job at the rope-factory where he was working. Boris was at school.

A letter from Masha on scented notepaper, clear distinct handwriting with grandiose capital letters curling over the perfumed leaves like the lascivious tendrils of an orchid. Misha read the romantic phrases in puzzled shame. Masha always got the better of him. He still loved her too much to trust his own judgment.

He showed the letter to his friend Sasha in the next cubicle, for advice and help.

Sasha was gay and happy-go-lucky. He loved women, sentimental music, and making everybody laugh. He was born with a guitar under his arm and made friends instantly with everybody he met. His wit was of the simplest. Misha loved him dearly, and for the two years of his Kronstadt training, the two boys were inseparable. Misha was already ashamed of the tattooings on his arms for he had soon discovered tattooing was considered uncultured at Kronstadt. Not so Sasha who had on his right arm an elaborate tattooing of a fat woman (naked save for her garters) who wriggled ridiculously when he twitched his muscles. Sasha, who preferred fun to culture, continued to amuse himself and the other boys with her contortions without turning a hair. On his left arm he had a tattooing of the Red Flag surmounted by the Soviet Star, both above the neatly inscribed motto:

“WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE !”

He took everything lightly—politics, his classes, and Misha's heartburnings over Masha. Sasha had pinned over his bed a faded French print, a cheap reproduction of a moist-eyed beauty whose charms were amply outlined in gauze draperies. Flanking this work of art were three highly-coloured postcards of fond lovers embracing. Sasha was no woman chaser but he was very fond of the women. So was he very fond of red Caucasian wine and stirring military marches and syrupy gipsy love songs. He took nothing to heart and swaggered through life easily with an ingratiating smile on his pock-marked face. He was very good for Misha. He neither praised nor blamed Masha, only indicated without saying anything that it didn't really matter either way, life was so rich, youth was so elastic, women were so plentiful.

So Misha answered Masha's effusions with restraint and Masha continued to send him flowery letters, scented with cheap perfume and adorned by sentimental poetry which impressed Misha despite himself.

Ludmilla's letters were now full of her work in the Young Communist Organisation, which she had joined, and of her three suitors, Seriosha, Mikhail the footballer, and lately, another Mikhail, a dark-eyed orphan who worked in the same factory. Seriosha permitted no other fellow to set eyes on the girl of his choice and there were savage rows which, apparently, did not altogether displease her. Misha took it for granted that Seriosha would win the three-handed tournament. In the meantime he himself was studying and playing games hard. The life suited him admirably. Every day he could see his splendid muscles growing tauter and more supple, his clear eyes sparkling with perfect health. All the naval cadets were at liberty in the evenings and on free days to take their girl friends out, but few of them cared to. The need for women was not strong. Their lives were so well-balanced, they were living so full and active a life, that the need for women was not urgent.

Spring. The boys began to be restless to get out on the sea. Misha yearning, wearied for the hot sun of Odessa, found to his surprise that as spring ripened he thought less of Masha. Mother wrote that Masha came every evening and when there was a letter from Kronstadt she blushed and paled; but Ludmilla added in the postscript that Masha was keeping company with other men. When he thought about it Misha's heart contracted, but he didn't think often about it because he was too busy to brood.

Misha and Sasha went out exploring on the rocks one sunny day. They wandered through the disused dungeon in the old fortress, empty and littered with dirt. On the floor, in one of the

mildewed underground cells, they found an empty tobacco-bottle marked with an old Tzarist trade mark, and a crumpled sheet of ruled ledger paper on which was scrawled in pencil the words of Lenin's favourite song:

*" Thrown into sinister dungeons,  
You perished gloriously  
Fighting for the Workers' Cause.  
You have accomplished your task,  
You have accomplished your task.*

*Your brief life was lived nobly,  
Sacrificed for your brothers.  
You shall be buried by your brothers,  
Your brothers in the combat,  
Your brothers in the combat.*

*No tears shall be shed,  
None shall give way to his grief  
Before your mortal remains,  
Before all that is left of your body.  
No ! Instead, choking with anger,  
Burning to march to battle,  
We swear before you to-day, Comrades,  
That we shall avenge you,  
That we shall avenge you.*

*Forward, in the midst of our sufferings !  
Forward, if need be, to rot in the same dungeons !  
Forward, to give to our common cause,  
Our hearts, our lives and our destiny !  
Our hearts, our lives and our destiny !*

*After our death, Comrades,  
Grim and implacable from our dust  
Will rise the avengers of humanity,  
Will come the day of triumph,  
Will come at last the day of triumph."*

For weeks after that the two boys investigated further, trying to establish which victim the dungeon had held. Misha was deeply moved by the incident. Even Sasha was sobered up slightly by this reminder of the old days. Misha thought a lot about that anonymous prisoner who had given himself courage scribbling out the march. Who was he? Perhaps he had been led from that filthy cell to execution. Perhaps he had died in exile in Siberia. Maybe he was still alive, one of the narrowing band of old Bolsheviks they were so proud of. Perhaps it was a woman.

It was so easy to be stirred by fine speeches and stirring military music on November the 7th, so simple to raise his voice in a mighty *Hurrah!* with the other cadets in the May Day Demonstration; so natural to take for granted the good things that were coming his way, the good food and good clothes, the encouragement to study, and the freedom for unlimited development. It dawned on Misha with something of a shock how he had been taking for granted these conditions which the Revolutionaries for half a century had worked and planned and suffered to bring about for him.

He knew only by hearsay what the Navy had been like in Tzarist days, when the food for the sailors was scant and rotten, when there were notices about the ships, reading:

FOR DOGS AND SAILORS ONLY
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and an ordinary seaman might reply to his officer in one of three fixed answers only:

- (1) "Yes, your honour."
- (2) "No, your honour."
- (3) "Glad to try my best, your honour."

This was "politics," this close connection between the scrawled song on the bit of ledger paper and the fact that he, Mikhail Ivanovitch, was now a qualified electrician, grade A first-class, specialist on searchlight projection. This was better than trying to run away with Seriosha and the gang in search of adventure.





This made one continuous line from the past into the present. At that moment of realisation Misha, with a great convulsion like the jerk which arrests you in mid-air as the parachute opens, found himself, knew who he was, why he was, what he was for. All the loose strands of his erratic personality drew firmly together for the first time in his life, and he decided to apply for membership to the Young Communist League. In time, if he proved worthy, he hoped to become a member of the Communist Party itself, like the unknown prisoner. He would help to fulfil the work of that unknown comrade, who to sustain his spirit had scribbled out Lenin's favourite song in the darkness of his cell.

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A qualified electrician now, Misha was sent to Sevastopol to work on the cruiser *Komintern*. He wore the name embroidered in gold thread on the ribbon of his little round hat. It was not just a word any more. Now he was in the Party. Life was so good, so full and exciting. Every day his horizon was widening like the meeting of the sky with the sea during the marvellous white nights in Leningrad.

It was good to slip into the family circle when he went home to Odessa on leave. What a blooming girl Ludmilla had become. He kissed Mother and ran a critical eye over young Boris. Masha was there too. He looked at her with new eyes. What had happened to him? Was she different, or was he? Had she coarsened, or had he grown cold? He listened with a critical ear to the romantic chatter which had once seemed to him so moving and so beautiful. He fidgeted in her company and spent every night of his three-weeks' leave at the opera. Even when they slept together he felt restless afterwards. He wanted something Masha could not give him. Something no man had asked of her before.

He was bored having only his senses satisfied. New ideas, new desires of which Masha knew nothing and cared less, streamed through his mind. He spent hours talking politics with Ludmilla's accepted suitor, Mikhail, the orphan.

This Mikhail had been left alone in Cheliabinsk at the age of ten, during the famine in which both his parents had died. He ran wild in the streets with a gang of half-starved children like himself, begging, stealing, looting anything to get a bit of food. He had stolen rides on the train all the way to Odessa. When the gang was rounded up, he had been sent to a children's home outside Moscow to be deloused, fed, clothed, and taught to read and write and clean his teeth.

He was intelligent, and deeply anxious to learn. He worked hard and studied. Now, working at the rope-factory, he was still studying. He wanted to be an aviator more than anything. He was a Young Communist. He knew more politics than Misha but was too young for the Party yet.

Misha liked him and was glad Ludmilla had chosen him out of the three, in preference to Seriosha, who was now the best sportsman in Odessa but averse to politics. Somewhere at the back of his mind Misha didn't want to be dominated again by Seriosha's quick brain.

During the next two years that Misha served on the cruiser *Komintern*, Mikhail graduated from the Aviation School a Third-grade Commander, Ludmilla married him, and he came to live with the family. Quietly he assumed the place as head of the family, treating Mother with a gentle firmness that dried up her tears of anguish at his unnatural profession, and continuing his studies. His Ludmilla he adored, refusing to sleep at night unless she lay with her head on his breast. Soon Ludmilla wrote joyfully to Misha that she was to become a mother.

1932. The drive for collectivisation. The whole Party was harnessed to the task. Misha was sent from his cruiser far inland to a village in the Ukraine to assist in the suppression of a Kulak rising. Desperate, the rich peasants were frantically trying to sabotage the harvest. One night Misha was awakened from sleep by the old farmer in whose hut he was staying, and warned that he must get away at once. A crowd of peasants armed with scythes and guns were already running up from the village to kill him. The Kulak ringleaders had made them all drunk on vodka and told them to kill all the Communists. Misha escaped in his underwear, flung himself on a horse, and rode all through the night to Party headquarters in the next village.

The rising was put down. The ringleaders were shot or sent into exile, and the poorer peasants gradually won over. Misha rode from village to village speaking at meetings, answering questions, patiently explaining the Party line to the rows of suspicious bearded faces. It was his first introduction to the close-fisted peasant psychology. Before long, when collectivisation had triumphed, when Maria Demchenko set an example to the whole of the country with her collective sugar-beet record, he marvelled that she, too, should have issued from the same Ukrainian stock. It was happening everywhere already. The children had a completely different ideology from their parents. No longer "Mine for me," but "Ours for us."

Misha had not written to Masha for two years. Now he was drafted back to Odessa to work in the Mercantile Fleet. His family had gone to live in the Central Province, where Ludmilla's husband was stationed. Their old home was empty. Misha, wandering aimlessly through the familiar streets, met Masha again.

He was lonely. On the spur of the moment he took her back  
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with him to the empty house on the Moldavanka. She stayed. Misha was quite happy for a few weeks. He liked domesticity. It was agreeable to have a woman about when you came home tired from working in the docks. Masha was strong in her sex and held him. So presently when she complained that the neighbours would talk if they did not regularise their union, he consented to go to *Zags* and be registered.

Masha had no other interest in life whatever beyond sex, and if Misha were not available another had to quiet her. Misha's boat carried lumber and provisions to the near East and he was frequently away from Odessa. She denied her infidelity but Misha was sick with jealousy. The summer dragged on slowly. Misha was wretched. He hated her more than he loved her. He wished he could live without her, and gave himself weakly to her after each quarrel. Masha standing with her arms folded over her fine breasts watched him slyly through her narrow black eyes until the storm was over and he came humbly to her bed. And when he was away she went walking in the Park with any of the waterside fellows who beckoned.

Misha's life was cut into two halves, the sharp edges of which tortured him. The strong cheerful manual labour on his boat, working in the comradeship of his group, and the uneasy lasciviousness of his domestic life. He thought bitterly how different was his marriage from his romantic anticipations.

Before long, to Misha's delight, Masha became pregnant. Now everything would be fine. Misha longed to be a father. Masha would settle down when she had a baby, and life would be golden again. But Masha had different ideas. Without telling him she had an abortion in the third month.

There was no longer anything between them. She had destroyed it. Misha suggested a divorce. Masha wept, then she had hysterics,

then she turned on him, arms akimbo, and cursed him soundly. So they parted.

Misha stayed on in the lonely room, eating his heart out. Perhaps it hadn't even been his child that she had destroyed ? . . . For months he didn't look at a woman at all.

It was over, finished. Misha put away her letters and her photograph at the bottom of his wooden sailor chest, and plunged head first into Party work. When he married again, he decided, he would marry a member of the Young Communist League, whom he could trust and respect. Meanwhile Ludmilla gave birth to a son.

In lonely moments Misha wistfully studied the photographs of leading Young Communist girls in the newspapers. He made rapid progress in his Party work; he knew his Lenin backwards, and when the big cleaning of 1933 came along, he got through his examination creditably in half an hour, although the questions they put to him were extremely intricate.

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Now the family came to settle in Moscow, where Ludmilla's husband, with a row of promotion chevrons, was already Commander of a detachment of the Air Force. Misha joined the family group. Owing to the housing shortage, they were assigned temporary quarters in the old bishop's apartment in the big disused church on Pokovka, two large rooms and a tall kitchen with a brick oven.

There were huge windows giving on to the busy main street; they were neatly draped in yellow curtains with a bobble fringe. They whitewashed the high-domed walls and spread needlework mats lavishly about. Ludmilla in the intervals of attending to



Leonid and her secretarial duties at the Young Communist League of her district, embroidered unnatural sprays of poppies on oblongs of black satin, further to beautify the rooms. Apart from these and a few self-conscious photographs of herself and Mikhail taken on holiday in the Crimea, there were two huge portraits, one of Lenin and one of Stalin, worked in red paper flowers on two circles of stretched white bunting, set high on the domed walls. They had a wireless set, six green rubber plants, and the complete works of Lenin bound in red cloth.

Downstairs the great empty church had been turned into a military training academy. There were lectures and physical jerks, exhibitions and rifle practice.

The family settled down happily in their strange surroundings. They danced and swam, ski'd and skated, and went in a group to

the theatre. They were all very busy with meetings and Party work, for with the exception of Mother (now Grandmother, now a *baboushka*), and little Leonid, they were all either in the Party or in the Young Communist League.

Grandmother had no time to feel misgivings about her brood, or the impropriety of living in a church, which after all she couldn't help thinking was much more comfortable than the dark hole on the Moldavanka. At first she was tearful every time her son-in-law took off in his plane, and she wept for days when Ludmilla began to practise rifle shooting, but in the end she got used to the idea long before Ludmilla won her Voroshilov badge, and later, when she started making parachute jumps, Grandmother hardly wept at all.

Leonid was a tough child, for all his golden curls and pretty dimpled face. His father, to banish fear, used to toss him right across the big room to Ludmilla or catch him near the ground when he jumped from the dresser. Grandmother trembled but the younger generation prevailed.

Misha took as deep an interest in his nephew as though he himself were the father. He got on very well with Mikhail, despite an occasional twinge of jealousy, for Mikhail, though younger, was much more intelligent than he was, exercising real authority quietly, when Misha would have flared up and hit out with his big fists. There was more prestige, too, in aviation, he thought, than in all his own string of jobs. But he had no time to think about it. He was plunged continually in a whirl of activity which suited him very well. What a lot of work there was to be done.

Now he was secretary of his local Young Communist Group . . . now he was director of a Bread Trust . . . now he was Youth Organiser of the whole district. He travelled a good bit on these jobs but his real opportunity came when the trans-Siberian Rail-

way was sold to Japan. Misha was sent to organise the transport of the two hundred children of Russian workers on the Manchurian border. The job took three months. There were all sorts of difficulties. Misha had to telephone to every station in advance to prepare food supplies. It was a fortnight's journey, through the bitterest weather, thermometer down to fifty below.

It was an exciting journey. The children were crazy with excitement to return to Russia. They sang and shouted and made speeches to the Pioneer Delegation which met them with banners and music at every station. At night a girl of sixteen, who had been a member of the Illegal Communist Youth of China, told them harrowing stories of their hardships. There was one stow-away, a cheerful, slit-eyed Chinese boy of thirteen, who had been adopted by a Russian family. The Chinese had not allowed him to leave China. Soldiers had dragged him off the train at Harbin, but Lee had slipped away and hid until the train was well into Soviet territory when he popped his head out from under one of the seats. When they got to Moscow Misha handed him over to the Government who, to his great delight, gave the child over to the care of the Pioneer Organisation.

More jobs. Organising shipments of flax from the provinces to the central factories. Intelligence work in a steel factory in Moscow where there had been secret sabotage. Political training of the youth in a Tractor Combine. Carpenter. Editor of Wall-Newspaper. Sports instructor. Organiser in charge of construction of military camp. Manager of a chain of cafés. Secretary of Youth Movement in a big metal works.

Misha worked in a big comfortable office at a table covered with glass holding flat a careful diagram of the different departments and organisations in the factory. Misha often consulted this diagram in the course of his daily work. There was also a long table



for meetings, covered with a red baize cloth, places laid permanently for ten. Beneath Misha's table was a small electric kettle so that he could make himself a glass of tea when he wanted to, and on the table was a bronze statuette of a ski-ing girl which Misha admired very much.

Misha sported a whole row of medals already for proficiency in swimming and diving, and fancy diving, a G.T.O. "Ready for Labour and Defence" badge, shooting and parachute-jumping, and he managed to read a good deal, too, though not so much as young Boris who was now a lorry driver on a night shift. Boris had a passion for the classics, especially Dostoevski, and was never without a book in his hand.

They lived in a heady atmosphere of achievements. The newspapers were full of successes. The stratosphere ascent. The Cheliuskin expedition. The Moscow Metro. The Baltic-White Sea Canal. Misha absorbed it all eagerly. He, too, wanted to do something wonderful and outstanding to help in the building of Socialism. He was too full. He could not digest so much. One year he wanted to be a sculptor. Next year, excited by Kagano-vitch's speech to the young transport workers, he decided to write plays. Intellectual feats appealed to him powerfully, because they did not come to him so easily as his physical skill. He was a fine athlete, strong with effortless grace. He could do anything with his body. His limbs thought for him.

His favourite author, Maxim Gorki, died. Misha's heart overflowed when he was chosen from the Youth of his district to be one of the Guard of Honour, round the writer's bier, during the lying-in-state.

He was more deeply moved by this funeral than by anything since his first encounter with Masha. Again he sat up all night, afterwards, pouring out his heart in his diary.

" . . . A great sorrow has come over our country. The giant of human thought, Gorki, is dead. I know that there is not a corner in the globe where his name is unknown. Great is the loss !

" Yesterday I had the great honour of standing guard at Gorki's grave. It's a thing I shall never forget in my life. I was not able to tear my eyes away from the dear good-natured face. It was so difficult. Hundreds of thousands of people were passing by his grave and on every face I could read high love and admiration for our Gorki. There was sadness in the eyes of everybody passing by, Red Army men, aviators, engineers, teachers, scholars, Stahkanovites, young, old and children. It is hard to describe the solemnity. The orchestra played without interruption. The scene will remain in my heart for a long time to come.

" I loved Gorki not only for his works but also for his bitter life in the past, for his sad wanderings, for his will power, for the bold fight he carried on against Russian autocracy. His childhood was very much like mine. But of all writers and poets I cherish special love for him. . . .

" Our youth shall not know the bitterness that Gorki felt in his youth. Our life must be bright like the sun, like a blossoming orchard.

" Let the whole world learn to live and fight as Gorki did, coming from the slums, from poverty to the greatest of world-wide fame."

\*   \*   \*   \*   \*

The night of Ludmilla's twenty-fourth birthday it fell to twenty-nine below. Thin wind whipped the streets, whirling the dry snow into eddies between black patches of ice. Even the

fast-flowing Moscow river stiffened and stood still as you looked.

Soon after nine o'clock the guests began to arrive in twos and threes. They clambered up the shallow red steps of the Pokrovki church, unwinding their furs and scarves as they entered and stamping the snow off their boots on the landing where Baboushka kept the winter wood and potatoes. After greeting Ludmilla they arranged themselves in a stiff row on the sofa, beneath the starched doilies, and sat.

Misha put some American records on the gramophone. Baboushka hurried back to the kitchen to attend to the salads. Politely and formally the guests rose in twos and danced together in the creaking English fashion, carefully placing their feet according to remembered instructions. Correctly, they pretended not to see Baboushka and Ludmilla making discreet trips between the kitchen stove and the birthday table, carrying great plates of kolbassa, green cucumbers, caviar, salads of white cabbage and cranberries, and huge bottles of Caucasian wine.

There was Boris, book put aside for once, Sasha all smiles, fingers itching to get at his guitar, Pania, Tania and Katia and Sofia Yefimovna. And more kept coming up the great steps. Mikhail, free at last from his work at the Aviation Academy, came bounding up the stairs, three at a time, threw open the door and greeted his guests. Leonid woke up and clambered into the living-room in his nightshirt to kiss his father.

Immediately the guests all became aware of the laden table, as though for the first time, and clustered thickly round it like bees returning to their hive. At the head of the table sat Ludmilla, her husband and her son. At the foot Misha. In between wedged the guests. Simultaneously they swooped on the dishes of food that Baboushka, grinning with toothless delight, conjured from the kitchen. Red wine poured gurgling into all manner of glasses.

Everybody talked and laughed, especially Sasha, who sat with one arm round Katia, the pretty textile worker, his mouth full, his plate heaped high with kolbassa, and made her laugh until she swallowed the wrong way and had to be thumped on the back.

Misha rose importantly, to propose the first toast, to his sister. Ludmilla giggled as her husband leaned over and whispered something in her ear. Leonid dipped an exploring finger into his father's glass. Half-way down the table Sasha in a hoarse whisper told Katia that he knew a man who actually brought up his young son on glasses of vodka. Katia opened her mouth and clicked her tongue in indignant disgust.



Glasses clinked and clinked again.

Ludmilla rose to propose the second toast, to her friend Pania.

"Comrades," she declared in a loud voice, "we have a Stahk-anovite here with us to-night. I propose a toast to our little Panyushka. I'll tell you what. She fulfilled her steel drilling last week five hundred per cent. There!"

"Pania!"

"Pania!"

"Hurrah for Panyushka!"

Everybody clapped and stamped their feet. Pania blushed like the beetroot salad, and put up a manicured hand to hide her hot cheeks. Sasha leaned across the table and kissed the other hand with exaggerated gallantry. Someone started a song:

*"Light is the heart from a gay song,  
Away with melancholy.  
In town and city it is sung,  
It is heard in every tiny village.*

*With a gay song we love life,  
It beckons and leads us.  
With a song on the lips  
Life goes merrily."*

Now they were all seated in a semi-circle, Sasha running preliminary fingers across the strings. Fox-trots had never existed. Each guest in turn strutted out alone to the middle of the ring to do a solo dance. Tania, a pale accountant in a blue pinafore dress, resisted, but she was pushed firmly into the circle. Shyly she raised thin arms above her head, paused a second, and threw herself into a wild gipsy dance. Sasha, eyes glittering, beat the strings furiously.

Head tossing, eyes flashing, feet drumming madly, Tania strutted round the circle challengingly. Raising her sharp elbows, as the song reached its climax, she shook her breasts in time to the music. . . .

It is over. Tania collapsed, breathing heavily, on the sofa beside Pania, as Mikhail took the floor with a lively step-dance. Smiling gently on his guests, he pushed back his curly black hair, crossed his arms, and circled twice round the floor. They watched his well-polished top boots and trim uniform admiringly. As he danced his Voroshilov sniper's badge swung to and fro on his chest.

"Milia," he called as he passed Ludmilla, and at once she jumped up and joined the dance, curvetting round him like a young foal, clicking her high heels and twisting her red silk dress as she moved. She laughed until two rows of teeth gleamed and disappeared alternately as she whirled.

"Bravo !"

"Hurrah !"

"Bravo, bravo, Milia !"

Screaming with joy Leonid was snatched up by his father and flung high across the room to be caught neatly by his mother.

"Comrades," thundered Misha, above the din, "fill your glasses. Another toast ! A toast for the new generation of our Soviet country. . . . For Leonid !"

And, exhausted by his own eloquence, he lit a large paper cone made from yesterday's *Pravda*, and balancing it miraculously on the end of his nose span round and round like a top.

\* \* \* \* \*

Baboushka, feet outstretched, sat at ease in the wicker arm-chair, and nodded her head cunningly in time to the music. She

looked up at the needlework portraits of Lenin and Stalin and thought how much trouble had been her portion. Ilya her first-born, frozen to death in the famine, and her beautiful young husband who had put on his little cap to go out in search of bread for the children, had never returned. And pious Grandfather who had died and been buried without a priest in unconsecrated ground, and now here were the children strong and well, God be praised, and earning steady money, and making free in God's own house. She couldn't read or write but she knew a thing or two, and she thought this was not so bad.







*Pelegaya Dmitrovna*







## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

PELEGAYA DMITROVNA	.	.	a peasant woman
HER MOTHER	.	.	a consumptive
HER FATHER	.	.	a drunkard
HER ELDER BROTHER	.	.	a counter-revolutionary
TWO BROTHERS AND THREE SISTERS			the rest of her family
PASHA	}		
MARIA ALEXANDROVNA		.	peasants on a Collective farm
NATALYA MIKHAILOVNA			
VANYA			
MARIA DEMCHENKO	.	.	a sugar-beet farmer
SONIA KIYENIA	.	.	a shock worker on the metro
ALEXEI STAHKANOV	.	.	Donbas miner
STALIN	.	.	General Secretary Communist Party
VOROSHILOV	.	.	People's Commissar for Defence
MOLOTOV	.	.	Chairman of People's Commissars
KAGANOVITCH	.	.	People's Commissar for Transport. Member of Political Bureau



## *Pelegaya Dmitrovna*

**P**ELEGAYA DMITROVNA was born in 1900 in a village called Kuntzeva, in the Moscow Province. Kuntzeva was mud and wood and monotony, a dreary swamp with no distractions. The peasants used to snare nightingales out of boredom.

Father was a poor peasant who failed to scratch a living from the soil. Mother, Father and the seven children lived in one small dirty room made entirely of wood. Even the ceiling was wooden. There was only one mattress. The children slept on the naked floor, fighting for a turn on top of the stove. Pelegaya's mother was a capable, hard-working woman, but in the end her health succumbed to the strain of rearing her seven children in such conditions. She contracted galloping consumption soon after the youngest was born.

Father went on spending every penny he earned on vodka.

Pelegaya, being the eldest, took the weight of the whole family, for Father was always dead drunk and Mother ill. She was very religious, and prayed twice a day to the ikon on the wall not to let Mother die lest she be left in sole charge of those six hungry

mouths. She knew that the ikon performed useful miracles when it was properly supplicated. But the ikon took no notice of her prayers. Mother died just the same, within a week, retching her heart out in gouts of crimson blood. After her death Father drank so much vodka that he became temporarily paralysed. He was always worse when coming round after one of his bouts. Then he would be in a mood of black depression and half kill any of the children who ventured near.

So Pelegaya had to be the sole support of the six young children after all. She tried her best to keep them comparatively clean and get some bread once a day into their bellies, but it wasn't easy, especially when the eldest boy started drinking too.

Then the War broke out. All the able-bodied peasants in the village were drafted into the army. Only those who had the luck to be imprisoned in a German concentration camp returned after the War. The rest died in the trenches, more from typhus and lack of food than from the enemy's bullets. The Revolution came. There was a village Soviet set up. But Pelegaya could not read or write and had no understanding of politics. All she cared about was getting through her day's work in the fields in order to keep those six children alive. She was a strong, capable worker. The local farmers respected her muscles and her common sense. She still said her daily prayers to the ikon, but with less conviction since the time it had notably failed her.

The first tangible benefit the Revolution brought to their village was the opening of a school. It was the first time such a thing has been known, and there was a clamour of protest from the religious old women, especially from the twenty-five richest peasant families. But the school persisted, and Pelegaya was glad to send her brothers and sisters there every day. It took them off her hands for one thing, and since God did not always



help, it occurred to her that perhaps being able to read and write might.

Pelegaya was already much sought after in the village owing to her shrewd judgment. She had so much trouble of her own that she always knew what should be done in any emergency. All the peasants, everyone in the village except her own father, respected her. Before long she was elected to the Village Council. After that constantly re-elected.

She was not a particularly good speaker, being shy and afraid of words, but she knew so exactly the value of each inch of ground and the worth of each peasant, she carried so many details in her head of farm management, and had such natural genius for organising, that she was soon made President of the Council in charge of the whole Collective.

Now the twenty-five rich peasants started making trouble. They were not strong enough to destroy the Collective, but they did their best. Twice Pelegaya was injured by bricks thrown through the window of her hut. It was the easiest thing in the world for them to set her father against her. They bribed him with vodka, so that every day he would insult and beat her, calling her a prostitute, spitting on the village school, and vilifying the Collective. Pelegaya put up with it because he was her father, and God had arranged the world as it was. Then one day she walked out of the room straight to the people's court and stated her case. Everyone in the village knew what had been going on for so long. Father was sentenced to eighteen months in jail, during which respite Pelegaya worked twice as hard on the organisation of the Collective and turned her attention to her eldest brother, who showed every sign of taking after his father.

Being a heavy drinker, he was easily led astray by the rich counter-revolutionary elements in the village. He was a tall,

handsome boy, shiftless and unstable as water, and unable to keep away from women. Even his two years' service in the Red Army had done him no permanent good. Presently two of the village girls became pregnant by him at the same time. Pelegaya chided the girls for listening to her brother's blandishments.

"Youth is stupid," she warned them, not that she was so very old herself. "It runs after fleeting pleasures and knocks its elbow."

When the children were born, the seducer was in the pay of



the rich peasants, and refused to support either the mothers or the children.

Pelegaya half expected the extra burden to be piled on her own broad shoulders. But the two girls worked cheerfully enough in the Collective and supported their babies themselves.

The second son and second daughter were working fairly well in the fields. In the following year one of the sisters married, the youngest boy and girl were still at school.

No sooner was the seducer sent into exile for his counter-revolutionary activities, than Father came out of jail. Pelegaya tried to make him live in another hut, for she feared his influence on the second son. But Father insisted on living together with his children. Ashamed because he no longer dared to beat Pelegaya, he complained every day to the neighbours on both sides of the hut, "I am not master in my own house any more."

He spent all his pension on vodka and did no work in the fields at all, although he was still only sixty and ought to have been helping the other peasants. Pelegaya gave him a daily allowance of bread but no money for vodka. Worst of all was his influence on the children. Whenever she was away from the hut for a day, all was in disorder on her return. Father persisted like a noxious weed.

A deputation of peasants came one day to the local Soviet and demanded that the village church be closed down. The local Soviet invited the other side to state its case. As the twenty-five rich peasants were already in exile, only a few old women came to plead for the church. Long discussion followed. The majority carried the day. The church was closed.

There were plenty of other things in the village now to occupy the women. A knitting-factory had been set up to give them profitable work for the winter months, when the men were busy

preparing the manure for the spring sowing. There were music circles and a radio, dramatic circles and a cinema in the new village club, and plenty of distraction. Best of all, there was a crèche to look after their children whilst they were working in the fields. The peasants were dazzled with the new life springing up in their old mud village.

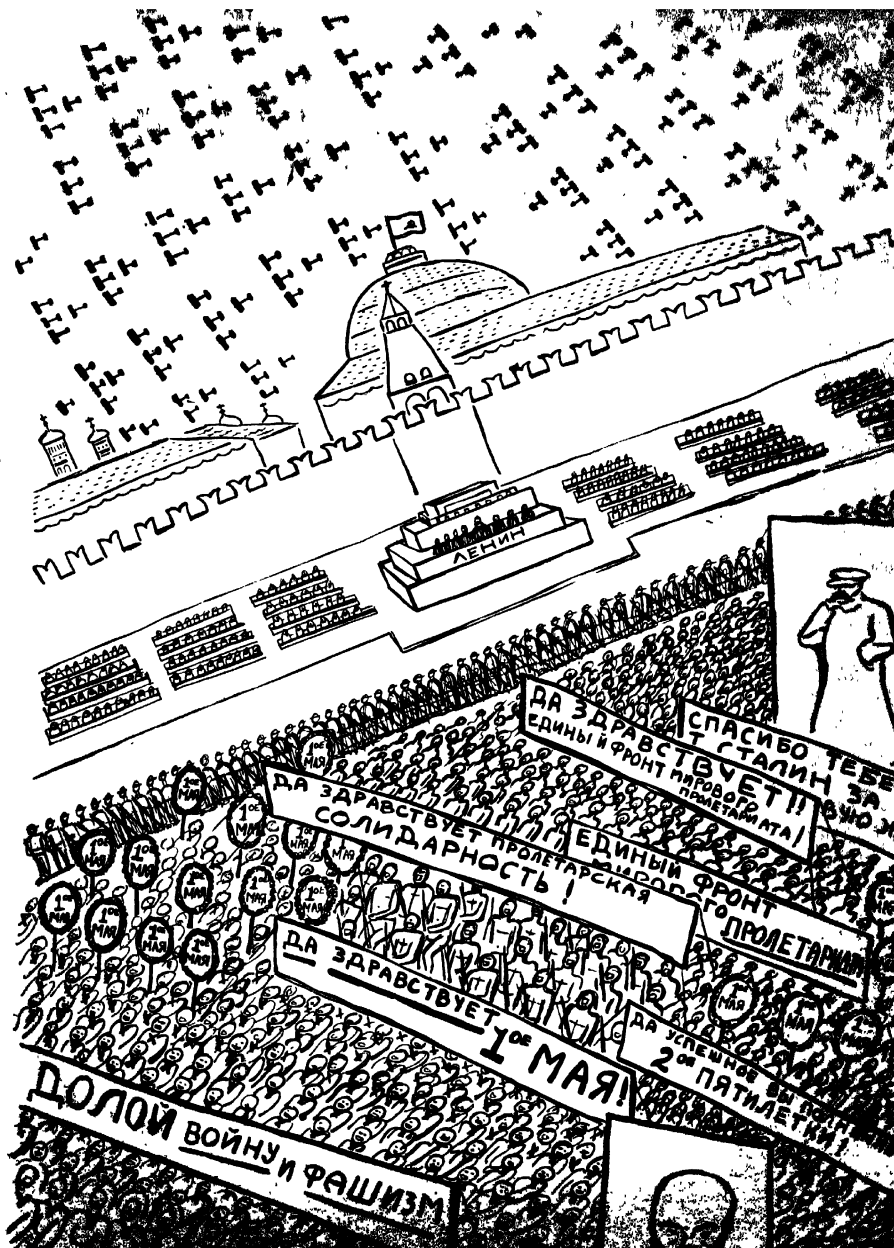
Yet it was not until 1930 that Pelegaya applied for membership of the Communist Party and started to learn to read and write.

Pelegaya was straining every nerve to increase the cabbage harvest on their Kuntzeva Collective, rising at four in the morning, and working until midnight. She made herself squeeze in amongst her duties as President of the Village Council odd half-hours when a special teacher came to her hut, to teach her the same lessons that the fifteen-year-old children were learning in the village school.

So well did she organise the Kuntzeva Collective that the Party began sending her out to neighbouring farms where production was lagging. In due course she was summoned to the All-Union Congress at Moscow to report on the successes of their work. She sat between Maria Demchenko, the sugar-beet heroine, and Sonia Kiyenia, the metro shock worker. Behind her sat Alexei Stahkanov who had produced a hundred and two tons of coal in six hours, in the Donbas.

A strong, red-faced woman in the middle thirties, dressed in a shabby suit, head muffled closely in a dun-coloured knitted shawl, Pelegaya rose from her seat to address the leaders of the country, Stalin, Voroshilov, Molotov, Kaganovitch, and all the other well-known faces she knew only from the pages of the newspapers.

These faces looked at her, and saw shrewd eyes, half-concealed in a crease of flesh, broad generous nose, and big mouth from which jutted a dominating lower lip. When she smiled her broad



cheeks folded good-naturedly, and revealed a gap where two side teeth were missing. Her report, delivered in a hoarse matter-of-fact voice, was brisk and to the point. They had actually harvested eight hundred and ten centares of cabbage and good crops of onions, potatoes and cucumbers. Cultivation of fruit trees had been introduced successfully. The Collective maintained three stores in the Moscow market for their produce, and the village co-op. was working very well. Each of the hundred and fifty farms in the Collective (it was only a small Collective), had a few pigs, cattle and poultry. The village club had one hundred per cent attendance. One of their dairymaids had been chosen to sing at the Moscow Olympiad, whence she had won a scholarship to the Conservatoire. With the exception of a few old women and one drunkard of sixty, everyone in the village was either literate or learning to liquidate his illiteracy.

During the congress Pelegaya wandered about Moscow and went to the ballet at the Bolshoi every night. Because she was a delegate, she had a seat in what used to be the royal box. Canopied and festooned sumptuously in crimson velvet and gold, nothing had been changed but the imperial eagles, which had been neatly picked out of the heraldic centrepiece and replaced by the Soviet insignia. Pelegaya was embarrassed next morning to find her photograph in the newspapers shaking hands with Stalin, and wished the congress would end, although she found it all very stimulating, for she was longing to get back to her crops and her family. Even when she was given a month's holiday in the beautiful peasant rest home near Yalta, she fretted for her work and went back to Kuntzeva ten days before her leave ended. Soon it would be May Day and that meant a break in work. She was anxious to see how the new fertiliser was making out. . . .

. . . The Collective had voted two thousand roubles for the

May Day banquet, there would be a grand concert in the evening, and the next day every family would entertain in its own house. She was looking forward to it with pleasure, but a little ruefully, because it ate up three precious days in the busy part of the season.

\* \* \* \* \*

Returning from the Congress, Pelegaya strode in through the outer gate of the Collective, nodded briefly to the porter, and made her way through the melting snow towards the central office.

In the barn, hastily fitted with rows of wooden benches and a blackboard, a book-keeping class was in progress. A young accountant from Moscow was explaining to the peasants the elements of double entry. Pelegaya cast a swift glance in passing at the rows of dark faces grimly concentrated on the difficult lesson. Still swinging from a clothes-line stretched across the room was the banner they had made when the delegates from a Tajikistan Collective farm had recently visited them. Clumsy white letters flared out against the red bunting:

Fraternal Greeting  
to our Brothers !  
Members of Collective Farms  
of Tajikistan !!!

Outside the office, for all the world to see, hung the Collective board that recorded their progress for the last five-day period. It was divided vertically into two sections. The black section was headed "*Shame on the backwards !*" the red section, "*Greetings to the shock brigaders !*" Pelegaya scrutinised it closely. There

were far more names on the red side. For months now the only regular defaulter had been her father.

The midday meal was over. The peasants were sitting around the stove in the office, resting their legs and arguing lazily. The room was covered in faded wallpaper. There was a large coloured lithograph framed in chipped gilt, "*Conference of the Military Council*." Prominent amongst the uniformed figures was Voroshilov in his younger days, highly dramatised by the artist. Round the earthen stove a group of old women were gathered, peeling tiny onions into osier baskets, and chattering like a flock of starlings. The men and the younger women sat a little way off, arms folded.

Through the shallow window, a waving horizon of snow-covered hills cut into the blue. Enclosed by a straight row of new wooden fencing, the local children were playing noisily with their sledges. Their voices rang clear on the icy air, as they shouted greetings to Pelegaya, coming up the path. She smiled back to them. She was fond of children, despite her domestic trials.

She entered the low doorway of the office, and nodded to the peasants round the stove. A big fellow rose to greet her. He was the brigade leader of the men, a hard worker with no nonsense about him. He and Pelegaya got on very well with each other. He had piercing blue eyes, a clipped fair moustache, and wore a furred hat pulled down over his flaxen hair. He ran his big hand round the collar of his thick grey sweater, as though to loosen his thoughts, and promptly poured out the string of figures that he knew Pelegaya was waiting for. She wrinkled up her eyes and wrote the figures down painstakingly in her black notebook; then she tucked the notebook away in the deep inside pocket of her flannel petticoat, before she was ready to sit down to the glass of tea one of the girls had run to prepare for her.



"God punish me if I'm not telling the truth, Pasha still prays to the ikon," began one of the women in a tell-tale voice, as Pelegaya sipped the steaming tea.

"What if I do, I do it to please my mother," retorted Pasha flushing with annoyance.

There was a cackle of comment from the old women's corner.

"Well, I only pray to the ikon that Vanya will give me more spending money for myself," simpered another woman in the far corner. "If he doesn't give me more, then I stop praying," she added hastily so that no one should think she was a fool.

"But you can earn more than Vanya gives you, yourself, Maria Alexandrovna," exclaimed the brigade leader. "You're a member of the women's choir, aren't you?"

"Indeed I am."

"And are there not forty of our women in the choir?"

"It is so."

"And when you give concerts to other farms are not the proceeds divided into two equal parts? Fifty per cent goes to buy the musical instruments for our club, and the other fifty per cent, is not that divided amongst the members of the choir?"

"Right."

"Then devil take me, why do you waste time praying to the ikon to make your old man less stingy? Earn your own money, Maria Alexandrovna."

Maria Alexandrovna, flustered by this novel suggestion, untied her print kerchief, scratched her head thoughtfully with her comb, and retied the kerchief very firmly behind her head.

Pelegaya said nothing, but made a sucking noise through the gap in her teeth.

The telephone cried sharply. Pelegaya lifted the receiver to her ear, gripping it firmly as though she were holding a banner in

a demonstration, and pushing her shawl slightly away from her ear to listen better. She spoke decisively into the receiver.

All of them were used to the telephone already, though not long ago they had trembled and crossed themselves when it became alive and talked in such a sepulchral voice. Then they had declared it was the devil's work, and would bring misfortune on the village, for God would be certain to turn his face away from such traffickers in black magic. Now the peasants were clamouring for more telephones to save the wearisome journeys across the fields. Pelegaya was finishing her conversation at the telephone.



"Impossible. You get your own workers on to it. Our comrades here are having their rest. Take your own men to do the job."

"Pelegaya Dmitrovna, God bless you, I declare everyone knows you are the best worker on our Collective," piped up a round-eyed matron. "Thunder strike me in this very spot if I'm not telling the truth. Without you we should still be burrowing in the earth like moles. Yet you remain unmarried, childless. This is not right, comrade. Pelegaya Dmitrovna should look around and choose herself a husband. My sister-in-law Natalya Mikhailovna



is to become a wife next harvest time. Let Pelegaya Dmitrovna do likewise. Then we shall celebrate their happiness with a Collective wedding. We shall give her a splendid banquet, and all our people will dance and sing joyfully."

She sat down out of breath, pleased with her effort.

There was a buzz of approval. All the room turned to look at the President of the Council, listening for her answer.

"Comrades," began Pelegaya, her voice more gruff than usual because she was confused by so much attention being turned upon her personal life.

"Comrades, as you all know, I am already six and thirty years of age. My life has not been so easy. A good husband and children are like light to the eyes, but a bad husband is a halter round the neck. At my age it is not so simple to marry a good man, and marry, a bad one I will not. Besides," she finished in a rush, "I am far too busy, as you all know, organising our Collective for a bigger harvest next year."

*Oleg Zacharievitch*









## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

OLEG ZACHARIEVITCH	.	.	a film student
GRANDFATHER	.	.	his father's father
GRANDPA	.	.	his mother's father
GRANDMA	.	.	his mother's mother
FATHER	.	.	his father
MOTHER	.	.	his mother
GREAT-UNCLE PYOTR	.	.	Grandma's brother, a farmer
UNCLE ALEXANDER	.	.	Grandma's eldest son, in the Cavalry
UNCLE VASIA	.	.	Grandma's second son, a doctor
UNCLE VALLODIA	.	}	the rest of Grandma's chil- dren
NINE OTHER CHILDREN	.		
NIKOLEI (KOLIA)	.	}	Oleg's pals at Tsarskoe Selo
GOSSIA	.		
SHURA	.	.	Oleg's pal at the smithy
VERUCHKA	.	.	Oleg's wife
SERGEI MIKHAILOVITCH EISEN- STEIN	.	.	Soviet film producer
NINA PETROVNA	.	.	Girl metro-worker
GENERAL ANTONOV	.	.	Anarchist bandit
MAROOSIA	.	.	another Anarchist bandit



## *Oleg Zacharievitch*

**I** WAS BORN IN 1912 at Tsarskoe Selo, outside St. Petersburg. My paternal grandfather came from the Ukraine. He was a very tall, heavily built man. Because of this he was drafted into the Tzar's special regiment, and served in the army all his life. After twenty-five years' duty, instead of getting his pension, he was given another job, watchman at the ornamental gates on the Tzar's estate at Tsarskoe Selo. It was a purely formal job, as the gates were purely formal gates. They were set out in the middle of the grounds in order to look nice, and didn't lead anywhere, one way or the other. It was all the same to Grandfather. He wore a fine blue uniform with shining brass buttons, and let his beard grow.

Mother's father was less distinguished. He was only a stable hand.

When Mother started walking out with Father, all her girl friends called after her in the street "Gutter Princess," because of Grandfather's aristocratic job in the Imperial Park. Father said they were only jealous, but Mother was furious.

Both Mother's parents and Father's parents were against their

marriage. Mother's parents because Father drank, Father's parents because they considered Mother to be of inferior birth. The result of this disagreement was that they courted secretly, meeting every Sunday in church specially for this purpose. When Mother was seventeen they eloped. I was born a year later.

Father was eleven years older than Mother. Mother was a tiny little thing. Father was immensely tall and flaxen, like Grandfather. It was true that he drank. He had been brought up in the barracks, and had been used to vodka since he was a child. Mother didn't drink, but she used to tell awful lies, she had been brought up so strictly. Mother's mother never forgave them for marrying.

Grandpa had twelve children, and was a heavy drunkard. When he was drunk he used to see green devils all over the room, and he would start sharpening the big carving-knife to kill them. Suddenly he would cry out that he spied a green devil, sitting on someone's shoulder or hand, or on their eyelashes, and then make a dive towards them, waving his big knife. Grandma was quite used to the green devils, so were the twelve kids. She used to stave Grandpa off the kids, and gradually coax the knife out of his shaking hands.

My earliest memory is brilliant sunshine. Bright green grass. I was sitting near a grandiose figure, dressed in blue, with glittering brass buttons. Behind soared a monumental structure, carved into a fanciful design. It was Grandfather and his ornamental gate. I was two at the time, but I remember very clearly.

I don't remember any more until I was four. The War must have been on I think. Father was away working on the military railway. I was left at Tsarskoe Selo with Mother. There was a special school established there for training nurses for the children of aristocratic families. They used to try the apprentice nurses on us ordinary kids first, for practice, and that was where I was sent.

The nurses used to take us kids out in the snow every day for exercise. We hated it, and cried like hell. Our clothes were not warm enough and we used to come back stiff with cold. Once I was taken into a terrifying room there, full of bottles and steel instruments, where they burned a wart off my hand. Lots of the other kids had warts too, but they didn't bother to burn theirs off. I knew well enough they only did mine for practice. I howled and howled.

A year later my mother's mother took me in because my mother was too poor to feed me. There was a grand lady took pity on a group of six or seven of us poor kids and gave us one lesson every day . . . she taught us the letters of the alphabet and the psalms.

One grand summer day I came home from this class, swelling with happiness. The world looked very good to me. The kitchen pans ranged in a row were glittering in the sunshine. A lovely smell of coffee tickled my nose. Nicest of all, in my pocket inside a little box, was a grasshopper I had just caught. I started climbing up the spiral iron staircase, singing at the top of my voice, the psalm we had just learned.

"Our father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name . . ."

Grandma ran after me, hauled me back and beat me very hard. She said it was for irreverence. I didn't know what that was, nor why I had been beaten. It was my first introduction to religion. Secretly I was sure it was because of the grasshopper. But all the brightness was gone from the lovely day. I sat on the stairs and howled as long as I could.

Grandma had a heavy hand. When my Uncle Vallodia, who wasn't much older than me, came home from skating, Grandma dragged off his white felt boots and beat him very hard with them.

I don't know why. Nor did Uncle Vallodia. I think Grandma beat us for the sake of our education. She thought it would make us good. On the whole my childhood was unhappy. It was very boring, most of it was.

A winter's day. A group of us kids standing near an iron fence. We were daring each other to touch the railing with our lips. One of the kids kept his mouth too long against the freezing iron. His lips bled and a burned spot popped out on his mouth. We ran away. We were afraid his mother would beat us.

I hardly ever saw my pretty little mother these days, except when she came to help with the washing. Always I was with Grandma. There was more to eat in her house. We ate potatoes mostly, but we had enough potatoes to fill us.

Grandma had a baby regularly every year. The older kids were fed up about it. They used to scold Grandma like anything when a new one appeared. There wasn't any room for any more as it was, and there wasn't too much food, even with the extra kopecks from the washing. When the twelfth came, Uncle Vallodia and the girl next to him took away the new baby, meaning to throw it in the river, but Grandpa, who happened not to be drunk that day, stopped that.

Grandma used to take in washing, to bring in a little more money. Sometimes my mother came to help her. We lived in a dark green steaming room, with the smell of ironing always in the air. The twelve kids slept on mattresses all over the room. The younger of my twelve aunts and uncles were about the same age as me, and we all played together comfortably.

We played in the streets mostly games of our own invention. Uncle Vallodia stole a lump of chalk one day, and drew a twisted face on the stone wall at the back of the house. As he drew we all sang:



*"Tochka, Tochka,  
Zapetaya,  
Vuishla Roshetsa  
Krivaya.*

*("Full-stop, full-stop,  
Comma,  
And the face  
Came out crooked.")*

It was 1917. My father suddenly came home one day from the front. I didn't remember him at all. I thought he was just a strange man. We moved out to a wooden hut, thirty kilometres from St. Petersburg, on a hill quite by itself near a broad river. We rented the two upstairs rooms to some men. They used to gamble every night and quarrel over their vodka. Father was away a lot in St. Petersburg, and Mother was scared to death of these men upstairs. I remember one night, that autumn, dark and stormy it was with the wind howling round the door, so that the whole hut shook like a leaf. Upstairs there was an awful row going on, cursing and screaming. Mother barricaded us in, dragging the bits of furniture up against the door. Then she got into a real panic and broke through the barricade herself, seized me and bolted. She didn't stop running until we got to the village.

It was uneasy weather all the autumn. The river was dark and swollen, running unsteadily, like a man in a fever. Even the air smelt of war. I remember a detachment of soldiers, jogging their way along the road to the station one foggy night. They were singing mournfully:

*“ Nightingale, Nightingale,  
Poor little bird,  
Sadly chirps the canary  
(Hey one, Hey two)  
Grief is not misfortune  
(Hey one, Hey two)  
Sadly chirps the canary.”*





**The Revolution.** I was five. I remember being in St. Petersburg with Mother. She had me clutched tight by the hand and was running for dear life down the street where the Kazan Cathedral stands. We burst our way into the courtyard for shelter. Crowds of people running in every direction. After them dashed Cossacks on rearing horses, tails and manes streaming. Firing. Then on our way back to our village, many soldiers on the train, with torn uniforms and boots full of holes. I was thrilled with their rifles and begged for one. I set up a howl when they wouldn't. I always used to howl in those days, not that it ever got me what I wanted. It wasn't fear either. I don't remember being frightened often, even in bad moments. I was always very curious to go and see what would happen.

I knew that Father was a Revolutionary before I knew what it meant. He used to talk with Mother and Grandma, far into the night when he came home those days. Lots of big words that I couldn't understand, nor they either. Words like "autocracy." Then one night Father told us how crowds of people, carrying a red flag and an effigy of the Tzar, had organised a big demonstration at Tsarskoe Selo, and had burned the effigy in a huge bonfire. Grandma crossed herself. What I thought was that it would be the end of the ornamental gate and no job for Grandfather. Anyway, there was no more Tzar in Russia.

I was more interested in the two machine guns in our courtyard. They were out of order and us kids swarmed all over them. There was always a lot of ammunition about, and Uncle Vallodia used to practise with a borrowed rifle, shooting at birds through the window when Grandma wasn't looking.

Rainy days. Puddles of wet in the courtyard. Groups of men in torn clothes and torn boots, belts and rifles strapped on anyhow over their rags, marching up and down to the words of command.

Us kids sitting astride the two machine guns, watching with our mouths open. All our games were soldiers and fighting. Red Cross wagons, rumbling through the streets. Soldiers marching. Rain. Rain every day. Food very scarce. Alexander, Grandma's eldest son, who was in the cavalry, brought home handfuls of linseed when he could, which we used to eat when the potatoes got scarce. One day he said good-bye to Grandma and all of us, and left for the front. He had a fine new revolver in a smart leather holster. He just disappeared. No one ever heard of him again. But Grandma had plenty of other troubles.

Grandma went to church regularly just the same and dragged me along. I liked going to church. There were always a lot of things to see, though Grandma clucked and scolded me for asking questions all the time.

Father was very confused by the simplification in the Russian alphabet which the new régime had introduced. It had taken him twenty years to write the old way properly. He used to sit up late at night scrawling words for practise, without the hard sign and the two extra letters, round the edges of old newspapers.

Now there wasn't anything to eat at all in Tsarskoe Selo. No potatoes, no linseed, nothing. It wasn't only us. Everybody was in the same boat. Grandpa suffered more than anyone else, not from scarcity of food, but lack of vodka. His system was so saturated he *had* to have vodka. But there was absolutely none to be had, and in the end he died for want of it.

Grandma's second son, who worked in a hospital in Rostov, sent for us. There was more food there. So Grandma put our shirts in a bundle, but no bread for the journey because we hadn't a crumb, and started off to Rostov with me and Uncle Vallodia.

I loved it, the confusion and noise, and all the people and their

bundles. There were lots of things to see. We got into a crowded wagon in a freight train, going somewhere: you couldn't be sure where, those days. But the train stopped so often and for so long you could always change and try another one. No fares, of course. No tickets. No conductors. Nothing like that. We changed trains at one big junction, with lots of freight trains, all crowded together on sidings, and hundreds of criss-crossing railway lines. Uncle Vallodia pushed me into a corner, and darted off with our bundle to fetch Grandma. After half an hour I began to howl. I thought they had lost me. And so they had. There were so many trains, all exactly alike, and such crowds of people with bundles that Uncle Vallodia couldn't remember where he had left me.

What a journey that was ! We crawled along like a snail for weeks. Sometimes the train would stop dead in the middle of the steppe for several days. Sometimes we would slip past stations without stopping at all. In one village where we got stuck, two beggar boys of five and six came running on to the platform to entertain us. They sang a lewd song and did a dirty little dance to illustrate it.

It was all about two dogs making love. I didn't understand it very much, but I knew it was sinful because Grandma made a horrified cluck-cluck. Then they made a collection.

There were all sorts of wagons attached to our freight train ; some had small stoves to heat them, some had a window and one or two even had regular sleeping berths. There were all sorts of folk travelling too. A lot like us, plenty of young children, and some real sailors. Our wagon was absolutely crammed with people, sitting down and standing up and sprawling all over each other.

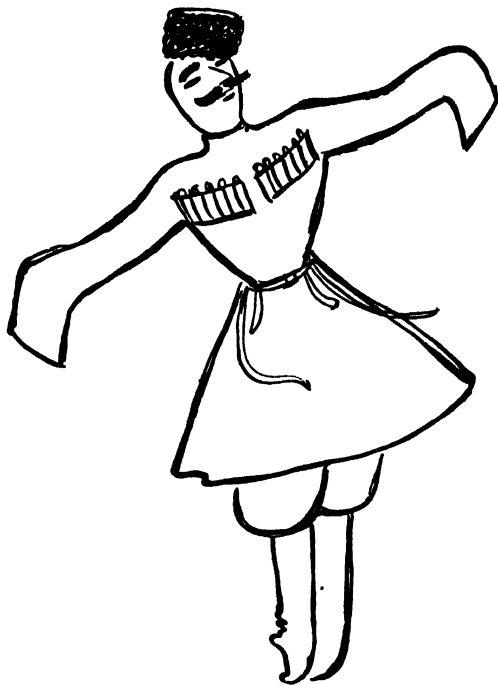
Now my Uncle Vallodia fell in love with a girl right at the far end of the wagon. It was a bit awkward for them, because he

couldn't see her at all, she was obliterated by a fat woman suckling twins. But every time the train stopped for a long time, Uncle Vallodia and his girl used to wriggle their way out and go for walks in the long grass, with their arms twined round each other, picking each other bouquets of wild flowers and all. Grandma didn't like it, but she couldn't get hold of Uncle Vallodia to beat him; besides, the other passengers did like it, especially the fat woman with the twins. Once, near Kharkov, Uncle Vallodia and his sweetheart got so busy loving that the train started off without them. Grandma clucked and tried to stop the train, but the pair of them ran after it and caught up. Uncle Vallodia leaped



on to the sleeper, and hauled his girl after him. She was so confused. Red as a beetroot. She squirmed her way back into the corner behind the fat woman with the twins and disappeared from Uncle Vallodia's sight for another two days.

As we approached the Ukraine, food became plentiful. But the peasants wouldn't sell because they didn't trust the currency, and we hadn't any goods to barter. So the sailors started shooting food from the train. They shot geese and wild-fowl and an occasional lamb. It was pretty smart sniping, when you come to think of it, because the train was moving in one direction and the birds were



flying in another, and all at different speeds. Grandma helped to prepare the meals. They did taste good and no one minded the bits of shot you came across in the broth.

Uncle Vasia was assistant doctor in the Rostov Hospital, and a somebody. He had two children, and his wife was very tall and skinny with a piece of black velvet ribbon tied tightly round her throat. I hated her passionately at the first glance. She came from a better family than us, and to rub this in she used to make us eat by ourselves in the kitchen as though we smelt bad. She never spoke a word to us directly.

Across the road from Uncle Vasia's apartment was a big yellow house. The people who came to Uncle's house used to talk big words about the War and the Revolution all the time. One of them asked me one day:

"Oleg Zacharievitch, are you a Bolshevik or Menshevik?"

But I wasn't going to be caught out, thinking it was a riddle, so I answered that I was a Menshevik, of course, because I was only a little boy. He laughed and pulled my ear.

There was a stable near Uncle's house, and us kids used to fight each other for the privilege of helping the ostler clean out the dung. I used to dream of becoming an ostler when I grew up. I thought it must be the finest job in the world.

Uncle Vasia's wife sulked around the house in a black silence. To get a break, Grandma decided to go and visit her brother Pyotr, a farmer in a small Ukrainian village. So we went by train to Taganrog and from there rode another sixty kilometres by horse to the little village named Ryabinovka, where Great-Uncle Pyotr had a farm.

I lay in the bottom of the cart, wrapped in a warm felt. The horses moved slowly. The wheels of the cart creaked. The sun was just rising over a big field of golden corn. Gradually the

immense sky purified to a clear intense blue, like a million cornflowers. The Ukrainian landscape was so beautiful it took my breath away. It was like a living fairy-tale. I decided immediately to become a peasant instead of a stable-boy.

I soon felt at home in the village of Ryabinovka. Great-Uncle Pyotr, his wife and children, Grandma and I, shared their white-washed cottage and their lovely greasy Schshee which they ate out of one big bowl, sitting round a low table and everyone dipping. I learned to drive the big farm horses, sitting on their strong necks in the warm sunshine, and went gathering water-melons every day in the fields with my relations. I lay on my back, spitting sunflower seeds at the sun and had not a care in the wide world.

It was too blissful to last.

Rumours spread round the village that the Germans were approaching, and the peasants started to hide everything they possessed, at the same time saying that they were totally indifferent to the Germans. And at last the Germans came. We watched them from behind our fence; a detachment of about a hundred soldiers marching through the one street of our Ryabinovka. They wore steel helmets and were followed by sappers busy putting up telephone wires.

After the Germans had passed through Ryabinovka there was an attack from the Cossacks. They invaded our cottage without warning one fine day, just when Great-Uncle Pyotr with a blood-stained knife in his hand and feathers all over the place was busy killing chickens in the yard. The Cossack leader, wearing a peaked cap over his swank hair-parting, led them into our yard.

I was outside when they entered, but I wriggled near and pressed my ear to the wooden paling to hear what was going on. I heard the Cossack leader proposing to Great-Uncle Pyotr that

he exchange horses with them. Now my Uncle Pyotr had a beautiful pair of horses which were the apple of his eye. He refused indignantly. A quarrel started. The Cossacks began rattling their sabres menacingly in their scabbards to scare Great-Uncle Pyotr, but his two husky sons came running out of the cottage to his defence. What with Great-Uncle Pyotr's defiance, his sons' brandished fists and the bloodstained slaughter-knife, the Cossacks thought it wise to retire without trying to do us any damage. They made off, scowlingly.

We only stayed in Ryabinovka two months altogether, but during those two months I spoke only Ukrainian and completely forgot Russian. When we got back to Rostov I had to start to learn Russian all over again, for I could not remember one word of it.

Uncle Vallodia got packed off to school and Grandma decided to start teaching me herself, reading, writing and multiplication. We didn't get on so fast because Grandma couldn't read or write properly herself. As for multiplication, it sunk us both. However, I soon caught on to reading and writing and was teaching Grandma before long.

The big words went on. Everybody wanted peace, but it seemed to get farther away all the time. Now it wasn't either war or revolution. It was Civil War. And that seemed even worse.

Uncle Vasia used to attend the wounded and the typhoid patients in the Rostov Hospital. The Whites were drawing near Rostov. My father was a Red. I thought there would be trouble coming soon the way things were going. Uncle's hospital was soon overflowing with wounded. There were so many they had to be dumped into the corridors and left waiting on the pavement outside, while room was squeezed for them. Uncle worked all day and night there. He hardly came home at all. Typhoid was increasing rapidly and before long the head doctors fled from the hospital.



But Uncle stayed on and did their work as well as his own, until at last he contracted typhoid himself and died within two days. His wife dropped unconscious when they brought the news. It was a shock to us all.

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, things were pretty bad. Here we were, Grandma, Uncle Vallodia and me, stranded in the house of this bitch with the black velvet goitre ribbon, who hated the sight of us, though not more than I hated the sight of her, I can tell you. Uncle dead. No money. Nothing. And Uncle's two kids to feed, too. We started selling the furniture a piece at a time and crowded together in one room, to save the rent. Uncle's wife was absolutely helpless. She had been so well brought up that she couldn't do a thing. She wept all day over her two kids and grabbed at the food Grandma used to sneak home for us under her skirts. All the burden fell on Grandma. She had to support the whole five of us. She could sew a bit, so she started to go to people's houses, doing their sewing all day for dinner and a few kopecks besides. She used to take me along too.

The first of Grandma's clients was a big important chap with a scarlet face. He kept a restaurant and had red boiled crabs in his window. I thought that was how he must have got his complexion, eating his own crabs. He also took bets on horseracing, as a sideline, and what with the restaurant and the bookie trade did pretty well. He had a very fat wife, and a fat daughter for whom Grandma was engaged to sew immense dresses. Grandma must have worked long hours because we used to get to the fat man's house long before the other children in our courtyard were up, and when we came back at night they were long since in bed.

In the fat man's house everyone, including us, ate together at a long table, above which dangled smelly fly-papers, thickly studded



with corpses. We ate plenty. While Grandma sewed I played with the fat daughter. All the time no one talked of anything but the Civil War.

One day one of us kids, playing in the courtyard, decided to put on a theatrical entertainment for the grown-ups in the house. We charged five kopecks entrance money, with which we were able to buy real curtains. It was *Red Riding-Hood*, and I was the wolf. I took my first rôle very seriously, both because it was the first time I appeared on a public stage and also because I wanted the money badly. The show went very well, and encouraged us to

give a much more ambitious performance of *Cinderella*, in which I played the footman.

During this period my education wasn't neglected by any means. I don't mean only reading and writing, and multiplication. The older boys in our courtyard used to mould pornographic figures in mud to explain to us younger kids what they knew. Every night these figures were carefully buried in the earth lest somebody's parents discover them, because Grandma wasn't the only one who clucked.

When Grandma had finished all the dresses and petticoats for the fat man's wife and daughter, she took on another sewing job in a grand house right across the city. It was a real mansion with an orchard behind the house, too, and all for one single family. It was so clean and shiny I was scared to go up the steps the first day. Grandma was put to work by herself in a little room upstairs on the second floor. The children of the house weren't allowed to play with me. I was taken downstairs one day so that they could show me their grand toys, and then I was sent away again upstairs. At meal-times a little bell tinkled and the family went to eat. Grandma and I were given our dinner by ourselves in the little workroom. We were scared of the fine food and didn't know how to eat it. We didn't get enough, either. It was in fancy small portions, one egg in a silver egg-cup and things like that. We were hungry all the time.

I was too scared to breathe all day, but when I got back to the courtyard at night I used to mimic our grand employers and their swank manners to amuse the other kids. The Whites were in possession of Rostov. They mobilised Uncle Vallodia into their service. Grandma packed me off to school to get me out of the way, but school soon closed down because Rostov was flooded with Cossacks and the Reds were approaching. Some of these

Cossacks camped in our courtyard, where they built a field kitchen. We used to crowd round, tin cups in our hands, and beg for kasha. Some of them were Kuban Cossacks; they wore flat round caps embroidered with gold and silver crosses. One of these Cossacks was a very fine swordsman. He used to do fancy exercises in the yard, cutting wood tossed in the air and all sorts of clever tricks. We had stopped playing Reds in our courtyard and played Cossacks now.

Across the way, outside the big yellow house, there was a poster pasted up on the wall. It was in lurid colours, and showed a Cossack on horseback brandishing his sword on which were spitted several Red soldiers. On the pavement every night the whole band of Cossacks used to gather and dance the *Lezhinka* like mad, with knives gripped between their teeth.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Red Army was approaching Rostov. The Whites began to retreat. Night. 3 a.m. A terrible noise outside. We wake up and jump to the window, without candle or any light. Thunder of horses' hooves on the cobbles. We peer out in the darkness. Ammunition wagons are bumping down the street and a tremendous crowd of people in their night-clothes streaming after them. Leaping into the wagons and jumping astride the wagon-horses.

Some carry boxes of cartridges. Others have thrown military greatcoats over their shoulders. Nearly all have rifles and cartridges in their hands. For two hours this stream of people and firearms continue to flow past.

It was almost daylight when the flood subsided. We were about to crawl back to our mattresses when there was an awful thump

on the door. We were terrified. But it was only Uncle Vallochia; he staggered in, wrapped in a soldier's coat much too big for him. He had lost his rifle, but had two boxes of soap which he had grabbed from the retreating Whites.

A morning of alarm. The Reds were expected. All kinds of terrifying rumours were spreading like wildfire. Especially amongst the merchants, in whose houses Grandma worked. We weren't afraid of the Reds of course. I knew my father was Red and I was in a state of high excitement. All the kids in the courtyard were keyed up too. They pined to see the Reds for themselves; they had heard so much about them. We hung out of the window of our room all the morning. The people from the rest of the house had fled with the Whites. Uncle Vasia's wife was hysterical and moaned all over the place until I could have thumped her.

Then along the main street a few machine guns came, hastily dragged by a handful of White soldiers. Outside our house they jumped off and began to load and fire furiously. They kept up this firing for twenty minutes, directing their aim towards the railway station. Then they fled. The vibration shattered every window in the house. Within two minutes of their disappearance, the first of the Red soldiers appeared. He was the first Red soldier we had ever seen. He wore a long greatcoat and a furred Caucasian hat with a red band across it. He took careful aim from the corner of the yellow house, and began firing his rifle after the retreating Whites. Three or four more Red soldiers came running up. Then a few minutes later a whole detachment of Red Army men came running up in pursuit of the Whites, leaving empty shell-cases behind them as they ran.

The Reds were not strong enough in number to hold Rostov. In the counter-attack the Whites won, and they re-occupied

Rostov. Now it was the Reds who were retreating. I was disappointed.

One day Grandma and all of us decided to go to the cemetery to see Uncle Vasia's grave. The cemetery was alongside the big barracks for the typhoid patients. It made it easier to bury them, being so handy. Near to the cemetery I saw for the first time a "common grave." It had been dug by the retreating Reds for their dead. While Grandma and Uncle Vasia's wife prayed at Uncle's grave, us kids nosed around this big common grave. We couldn't understand why it had no cross on it.

It was a beautiful sunny day. The birds were singing their hearts out in the branches. We knew the restaurant-keeper was running his horses in a race that day, and we itched to go to watch the races. So we sneaked off by a short cut we knew about, right across the fields. On the way we came across a horrible shambles of dead horses, abandoned after the battle when the Whites had retreated. Hundreds of carcasses of horses, mangled and burst asunder in hideous jagged lumps of bloody flesh and guts.

The whole field was pitted with shell-holes and ugly ruts, and in one shell-hole we found a dead white mare with an unborn colt half protruding from its belly. Scattered about all over the field were glittering epaulettes thrown down by the officers as they ran. But we went to the Hippodrome just the same and enjoyed the races very much.

It wasn't long before the Reds attacked again, and so it went on right through all that summer. Eight times the Reds attacked Rostov before they held the city. The last retreat of the Whites was pretty bad. They destroyed everything they could lay their hands on, because they knew they wouldn't return this time, and they set the big yellow house opposite us on fire before they fled.

We tried all we could to fight down the flames, but the fire was

too strong for us. The women formed relay-chains with buckets of water while the men scrambled through the fire to try to drag the bodies out, but it was hopeless. The house burned for two days and two nights, and all that was left of it in the end was a charred skeleton which threatened to collapse and bury us all any moment. The men had to demolish the walls before they fell down themselves. There was dust choking the air for an hour and a half afterwards. The Whites set the hospital on fire too, before they left; Uncle's old hospital. We thought that a bit mean of them,



because there were wounded Whites there, too, as well as wounded Reds.

For days afterwards the men were digging out charred human remains. We kids took it all calmly as part of the ordinary course of existence. It was a bit exciting when anything specially gruesome happened, that was all.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mother was with Father at the front then. That was as much as we knew. One fine day Father turned up quite unexpectedly. We had hoped he might come with each wave of the Reds, and had almost given up hoping. He was the perfect father of all my dreams. A Red Commissar hero and on a horse as well. He had a big revolver strapped to his belt, a sword by his side and he was accompanied by an orderly on another horse. When the first excitement of meeting him was over I demanded to be set on the horse and given a ride through Rostov. So, while Father was telling Grandma all that he had done, the orderly trotted me through the ruined streets. We rode past shattered buildings, emptied shops, looted stores, streets of deserted houses where every single window was shattered. Once or twice we passed armed Red soldiers, who greeted us as we passed. In the main street we galloped our horses right through the shattered shop-front of what had once been a chemist's shop. The shelves were all smashed, and hundreds of bottles of medicine and phials and boxes scattered all over the place among the fallen bricks and plaster. The big glass jars that had held the coloured water were in smithereens. In the middle of all this confusion, Father's orderly started hunting patiently through the débris hoping to find a



certain patent medicine he wanted which was supposed to cure stomach-ache.

Two days later Father took Grandma and me away from Rostov to Syerdopsk, where Mother was. And that was the last I ever saw of Uncle Vasia's wife with her bad temper and her black ribbon. I hadn't seen my mother for two years, and she couldn't leave her work amongst the wounded until late at night. What happiness when we were all re-united ! I had grown very tall and lanky in those two years. Mother hugged me. She rumbled my hair and poked my ribs anxiously to see whether I had put on any fat. I hadn't, of course. I don't think I ever will.

But our family happiness didn't last long. Before the week was out Father was ordered to the front again. The great thing in my life just then was that Father lent me his revolver. I used to try shooting at a big hungry-looking kite with it, but without success. Father didn't succeed either. We wasted a lot of ammunition and the kite flew away unperturbed. And soon Father and the revolver flew away too.

I was seven now. All my dreams were military. I wouldn't have been a farmer any more for anything. All of us kids were bursting with military glory. We organised ourselves into bands of sharpshooters, and armed with bows and arrows, made life hell for every dog and cat in Syerdopsk. No creature dared show its face when we appeared, with our rusty knives, cast-off rifles, and home-made wooden bows and arrows.

In between we relaxed our military exploits and went off fishing in the River Syerdopsk, then narrow enough for us to leap across, and stealing ripe apples from the orchards of the monastery.

Our fiercest battles were fought out in the main street, between the kids of lower Syerdopsk and the kids of upper Syerdopsk.

As neither side would consent to be Whites, we both considered ourselves Reds.

But these blissful summer days were not to last either. The Saratov District where we lived was ravaged by Greenbands. They were counter-revolutionary, Anarchist, as much as anything, and preyed equally on the Reds and on the Whites. They were led by a fierce woman chief named Maroosia, about whom hundreds of terrifying legends had sprung up. Maroosia was a hysterical schoolteacher of petty-bourgeois origin. The two chief stories that were circulating about her at that time were these:

*Firstly*, that she had raided a near-by village, seized five people whom the rich farmers had denounced as Communists, cut stars on the living flesh of their backs and sprinkled salt afterwards on the raw wounds.

*Secondly*, that she had arrested the local baker of the same village, together with his son, and buried them both alive in the dough of their bread-trough.

This was the Maroosia who was now approaching our own village. Gradually all communication with other villages was cut off as the Greenbands encircled us. Food became scarce. We began to feel the pangs of hunger. Again we were reduced to linseed cake, sneaked from the horses.

The Reds managed to keep Maroosia and her Greenbands out of Syerdopsk, but we were on very short rations. The Anarchist, General Antonov, and his soldiers, were about, too, all that winter.

Mother was hard at work in the village Soviet, where for the first time in the entire history of Syerdopsk an effort was being made to bring some sort of culture to the village. The effort was finally left in the hands of the Precentor of the Church, who organised a choir to sing Revolutionary songs. He rehearsed our choir in his spare time, in the evenings, because the rest of the day

he was busy on his ordinary job, singing psalms in the church.

I spent most of the day sitting in the village Soviet with Mother. The chairman and I were attracted to each other by a passionate desire to outdo each other in the choir. We sat together for hours in his wooden room teaching each other the verses:

*“ Our guns, our guns were roar-oaring,  
Machine guns crackling fire,  
At our approach the Bandits flee . . .  
We march we mar-arch to Victory.*

*We throw together stre-etchers,  
Made from two blood-stained guns  
Supported at the head and at the feet,  
Crossed, yes, crossed with swords of steel.*

*Upon them lies our conquered foe,  
Pierced through the heart with a dagger,  
His Excellency, General Antonov,  
Behold he bleeds, he bleeds his li-ife blood away.”*

But that didn't dispose of General Antonov, and as the spring advanced he and his Anarchists, and Maroosia and her Green-bands returned.

There were nights of alarm and restlessness. All the Young Communists in the village were mobilised. . . . So were all sympathisers, amongst them my mother.

Mother went out as a Red Cross nurse with the Red armoured train and did not return. Syerdopsk gathered together all its forces and prepared to fight to the last drop of its blood.

Nights and days of shooting. Alone and ashamed of being scared I lay on the stove hiding my tears. Every morning very

early I used to run over the soft spring earth, over the manure-heaps, through the slush and the rain-puddles right to the very last fence of the village. There I would stand listening to the rattle of rifle-shooting and the boom-boom of the guns, quite near, just beyond the hill.

Now I knew very well what Communists were, and if anyone had asked me if I was a Bolshevik or a Menshevik I should have answered up boldly:

"I am a Bolshevik because so are my mother and father." Now I knew that being a little boy had nothing to do with it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mother returned later in the spring and soon afterwards I contracted inflammation of the lungs. So it was decided that when I was well enough to travel Mother should take me back to Tsarskoe Selo. When we were ready to go, our narrow Syerdopsk river was swollen by the spring floods to a roaring torrent more than thirty metres wide. A tar boat carried us across. It looked more dangerous than Maroosia and Antonov put together.

Tsarskoe Selo again. We went to stay with the other Grandma. The food situation was bad in St. Petersburg. And we could only get our daily ration of one-eighth of a pound of bread by waiting in a queue a whole day. I don't know how we got through that summer, honestly. Somehow we scrounged along from one wretched meal to the next. All the same, the Government managed to start a Soviet school. I went along with one of my aunts, who was almost the same age as me. Now we had no food at all, and the whole family of us, about ten people, started to cultivate a bit of a vegetable patch, as other families were doing, near the village. We grew potatoes mostly.

We had to guard our patch night and day from a little sentry-box built specially; we had to weed our crop very carefully, there were so many shells and cartridges buried in the ground all around, and some of them were alive, especially in the ditches where the nettles grew from which we used to make our soup. Then we organised expeditions to gather mushrooms. There weren't many left in the woods, so many hungry people had been after them already. Not that we didn't find plenty of things on these expeditions, but not so good to eat. Things like soldiers' coats and skeletons mostly.

School went merrily and I was the best pupil in our class, being very eager to learn everything. As autumn approached the situation got a bit easier, but often enough we had to warm our bellies near the stove to quiet the cramps caused by hunger. We went foraging



all over the place for bread and grain, travelling on the roofs of the trains and in freight cars. There were no tickets of course, no fares, nothing like that, in the year 1920.

We had no light, no candles and no oil for lamps. We used to light pieces of rag and stick them in empty medicine bottles.

I used to play chiefly with my friends Gossia and Kolia. Gossia read us pamphlets about the Revolution and ragged detective stories he had picked up, God knows where. We started to organise children's detachments of Reds, armed with all manner of cardboard weapons. These caused accidents sometimes, because our paper bombs were highly explosive and very dangerous to the person using them; but my favourite weapon was a dummy revolver I had bought with a million rouble *Limonchiki*, and cheap at the price. That and a dozen caps, and I had the ideal gun.

With the approach of winter our misfortunes increased. No more wood and no more twigs to be collected in the park. When the city Soviet gave instructions for the breaking up of old wooden houses for winter fuel, all the people of the village crowded round, clamouring for logs.

That winter there was a counter-revolutionary uprising in Kronstadt, led by officers and kulaks, who were furious at the prohibition of free trade, during this period of military Communism. There was plenty of food which they had been hoarding to sell for higher prices. The uprising was for the purpose of protecting their liberty to profiteer. All the young Communists of Tsarskoe Selo mobilised themselves to help repulse the uprising. Gossia and Kolia, who were older than me, were given real guns and sent to this new danger spot. When they returned, bringing a lot of prisoners back with them, Gossia reported that they had attacked Kronstadt over the frozen ice of the Finnish Bay . . . advancing in rows, singing at the tops of their voices.

We did all sorts of things to scrape together food or objects that we could barter for food. Mother turned her clever fingers to the construction of string-soled boots with waterproof tops which she cobbled out of odds and ends found in the débris of the fields. People were glad to buy them. For there were still no regular shoes of any kind to be had.

Not only was our children's school going very well by now, but all sorts of children's organisations, clinics, boarding schools and crèches were being organised in Tsarskoe Selo, although there was little enough material to equip them. These were the beginnings of what later became *Detskoe Selo, the Children's Village*, as it is to-day. There was soon not a street without its children's home, and on most of the streets there were three or four homes. They were soon crammed full. So many kids were orphans these days, so many had lost their fathers in the Civil War, and their mothers couldn't support them. There was a children's home next door to us. I used to play with the children there. They had fine equipment for their gymnasium, and I became passionately enthusiastic about physical culture, something I have never even heard of before. The city Soviet and the Young Communist Organisation encouraged us to develop our lungs and our muscles. We had competitions and learned to ride properly, not anyhow, as I used to on Great-Uncle Pyotr's farm. Girls, too, of course. They did all the things we did. Some of the village didn't like it and there were stormy discussions in every home. The older people said it was bad for the health and that sport would undermine morality and all.

But us kids took to it like ducks to water. We had the time of our lives and screamed with delight at the film shows after the physical culture classes.

Suddenly Father swooped down on us again and carried us off

to St. Petersburg where he was assistant-chief of the St. Petersburg Militia. The woman we lodged with there, and the woman next door, were both widows who scraped a living by sending their children on to the streets to sell cigarettes and sweets till late every night. It was rotten work. There were so many other kids selling the same things, and they used to be chased by the Militia for trading without a licence. I used to sneak out and help them on the quiet sometimes, though Mother had strictly forbidden me. I did it because the kids used to help me get into cinema shows; I was mad about the cinema. They wangled it like this. We all laid down flat on our bellies and crawled up unseen to the bench at the entrance. Then it was fairly easy to wriggle past the ticket-woman in the crush if she hadn't spotted you up till then. We used to sit through three or four shows, sitting on the cigarette trays in order to see better. I lapped up the films.

It was the N.E.P. period. All sorts of human dirt skulking in the St. Petersburg underworld now swam up to the surface and began to take an active part in the life of the city. The streets were strange, vivid and merciless. Bandits, thieves, hooligans and all manner of dark elements sprang into the open. Drunken parties went on almost every night in the flats upstairs, for prostitutes, nancies, and foolish pretty girls in shameless dresses. Often these orgies led to quarrels which were fought out in the street right outside our windows. It made sleep difficult.

Us kids picked up everything like monkeys. Now we started playing N.E.P. men and bandits, and detectives. Sherlock Holmes and Pinkerton were our idols. Kolia was determined to be Nikolei Holmes, and he kindly permitted me to be Oleg Watson. All was in order except the pipe. He had to smoke a pipe. Where and how? First we tried smoking paper . . . that was no good. Next we tried smoking dried leaves. That was already an improvement. Kolia



then started lending out books from the ragged library of ten detective stories he kept hidden in an old trunk, in return for cigarettes. We worked awfully hard on our detective careers. We goaded other boys into stealing the dolls belonging to the girls who played in the courtyard, in order to be able to track them down afterwards.

Nikolei Holmes and Oleg Watson didn't last long. Soon I found a book of Jules Verne in the school library and dreamed of other conquests. Kolia didn't want to stop his detective career, at which he was doing brilliantly, so we parted.

Before I had got very far with my new ambitions, however, both Mother and I took sick with typhoid. I was desperately ill and nearly died. It was two weeks before I knew what was happening around me. I was so weak when I came to I couldn't move a finger. I lay like someone buried under a great mountain. Mother was in bed just across the room. We muttered words to each other and wept for no reason but weakness. As a matter of fact we were both lucky to be alive at all, and it was only Father's courage, in watching for nights on end and risking infection himself, that had pulled us through at all.

When I was examined on leaving the hospital the doctors found my lungs in a bad state. I was forbidden school and sent back to Tsarskoe Selo. I was already eleven.

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Next year, though I was cut off school, I took an active interest in the first Pioneer Organisation to be started in our village. Then Mother took me off to a farm in the North Volga region. It wasn't only for my lungs. It was because she and Father weren't getting on. Mother became more and more nervy, and at last she

jumped off the train. I had to come back without her. Father hunted everywhere for her. At last he found her, very ill, in a provincial clinic and brought her home again. They got on better after that. They always got on better when things were difficult; I suppose it was because they were more used to having them like that.

In our Pioneer Organisation at this time there were big discussions going on about religion. The Pioneers used to laugh at me because I wore the cross that Grandma had fastened there round my neck under my shirt. I couldn't puzzle out who was true:

My religious Grandma,  
My irreligious parents,  
Or atheist Pioneers.

But I finally decided not to sacrifice my youth to Grandma's ideas, so I pulled the cross off one day when I was bathing, without telling Grandma of course, and applied for membership to the Pioneers. Really it was Grandma who put me off religion, because she used to make me learn the prayers by heart, gabble-gabble, and cut me off meals if I wasn't word perfect. I was always bad at remembering things by heart and so I went hungry a good deal of the time.

I was earning my living on and off during the next six years, collecting old iron and old clothes for sale, with a brigade of other boys. We badly wanted a real job, but there was a lot of unemployment just then, and we used to wait in long queues at the docks to get work as stevedores.

I shall never forget Lenin's death. At the moment of his burial all the factory sirens blew to announce the beginning of the five minutes' silence. We heard them all the way from St. Petersburg. It was so cold. I looked at my father in the terrifying silence.

He had his head in his hands on the table, and was weeping bitterly. I cried too. That day our home felt desolate and empty like the streets. And they called St. Petersburg, Leningrad.

I had only been as far as the fifth school so I only got half the regular education, but I went along to the labour exchange in Leningrad, to try for work, although the doctor told me not to.

I got a job as a blacksmith's apprentice, four hours' practical work, four hours' theoretical work. I was sent to a factory to do a real job. I was nearly eighteen. I was a man now.



This foundry was certainly the most glorious experience in my life. Never had I enjoyed anything more. We used to beat out all kinds of machinery first by hand then with a steam hammer. We tackled the biggest jobs, and my brigade was the best and most capable brigade, because those in it could almost all read and write. I have often thought I should like to go back to the smithy again sometime for a year. I can't think of anything more satisfying. It was like sculpture . . . you took a lump of iron and bent it to your fancy. Then the rhythm of it made me drunk with excitement. It was never exactly even. It depended on the chap driving the dynamo. My machine was quick-tempered, with a gay, savage pulse. She ran perfectly to the tune of *Yablaki*.<sup>1</sup> Me and my pal Shura, who worked next to me, we used to sing at the top of our voices all day. I enjoyed being master of the giant machine. It was good to feel her obeying my wishes. Our black overalls were all whitened at the shoulders from the continued sweat which poured off us all day. We drank gallons of water. I was very proud of my job, and held up my head higher than Grandfather had ever held his when he guarded the ornamental gate for the Tzar. I grew strong and healthy and the muscles tightened in my arms and legs. I was six feet two already and had practically finished growing. But I wasn't getting big like Father and Grandfather—only lanky.

When all the twenty hammers were going, not another sound could be heard in our factory. A moment would break in when they all happened to be silent together . . . then off again like hell. Clang clang calang clang calang.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

<sup>1</sup> "The steam blows, the boat goes,  
We'll feed the fishes with Whites."  
Ai, ya-ya! Ai, ya-ya!

I was doing other things besides being a blacksmith. I started writing two novels, and also put together a lot of satirical verses, some of which were used for our local Pioneer's *Living Newspaper* revue. This success encouraged me, and I started writing fantastic scientific stories after the manner of H. G. Wells, whom I had just discovered. Then one day, nosing around the library in search of fantastic matter, I stumbled across Pudovkin's technical manual on film-making and at once became deeply interested. My old passion for the films blazed up again. So I decided to sit down and write a scenario. It was to be all about Tsarskoe Selo. . . . I was very patriotic about my native village you see, and thought it had not received enough attention, what with all the big shots always writing about the storming of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg and the taking of the Kremlin in Moscow. Well, I started off all right to write about a worker's excursion to Tsarskoe Selo. That was my first effort for the films.

\* \* \* \* \*

Of course I never sent it in. It looked to me too primitive when I'd finished it, although I didn't know enough to understand where or how to put it right. But I was bitten right enough, and after I had seen Dovzhenko's *Earth*, which had just then been released, I decided that films were the only future for me. In fact, I was quite sure. I wasn't getting much chance to find out more about the technique of film-making. I was still hard at work in the foundry, and putting in a lot of time as well on the editorial of our factory newspaper, *Alarm Clock*. I was young and inexperienced then in organising people. It's something that only comes with practice, same as skating. Whenever a new film was put on at the local kino off I darted. I didn't applaud everything

blindly any more though. I was especially interested in the technique, and spotted plenty of weaknesses.

Next thing that happened was that I got in correspondence with the editor of a cinema magazine called *The Worker and the Theatre*, who took me along to a factory group which specialised in scenario-writing. There were five hundred of us altogether. It was well organised. Good criticism and fine lectures from the best professional film artists. Then I got to know a lot of people in the film world, and started studying madly all the books I could find on art. I wanted to know everything. I lapped up knowledge greedily, and must have got through hundreds of books at that period.

You see I already had pretty strong ideas on what films *ought* to be . . . I was sure a lot of the stuff the studios were turning out at that time was just so much eye-wash . . . as I still think a lot is. I thought, and I still think, that films should be a clear answer to all manner of contemporary problems. Our studios were then putting on woolly productions, full of idle abstract chatter that made me sick; with the real agitational issue always muffed. Because I was so critical and lifted my voice to air my grievances the factory Kino Group sent me to the film factories and studios to investigate conditions there at first hand. I found what I expected. No actual wrecking going on but a hell of a lot of hot air being pumped out. The companies were full of fancy artists too snobbish to open their eyes to the outside world. There was plenty of money on tap, and first-class material, but the damn fools didn't know how to get their teeth into the problems. That's how it looked to me. I was eighteen and burning to show them how it should be done. Mind you, I wasn't really as cocky as I sounded. I tossed off a scenario myself called *Private Life*, which seemed to me well-knit and sufficiently comic, on the relations

between individual Komsomols<sup>1</sup> and the Komsomol organisation, but a film student who had actually graduated from the Leningrad Film School told me that you couldn't expect to pull off a good scenario before you had written nine scenarios. In the end my scenario was stolen by a professional scenario writer who passed it off as his own. There were plenty more where that came from, and I didn't give a damn, especially when I saw the production of it later on, which was a flop.

I was working very hard at the foundry at this time, and it wasn't easy to combine both jobs, because there were not many trained smiths in our shop, and such of us as knew the job had to put in a lot of extra time training the new recruits, who were mostly backward peasants and lazy. But I kept my end up by speaking quite a lot at the Trades Union of Artists. I didn't know any of the tricks of oratory, but I knew what I was getting at, and if what I said was rough, well it was always to the point.

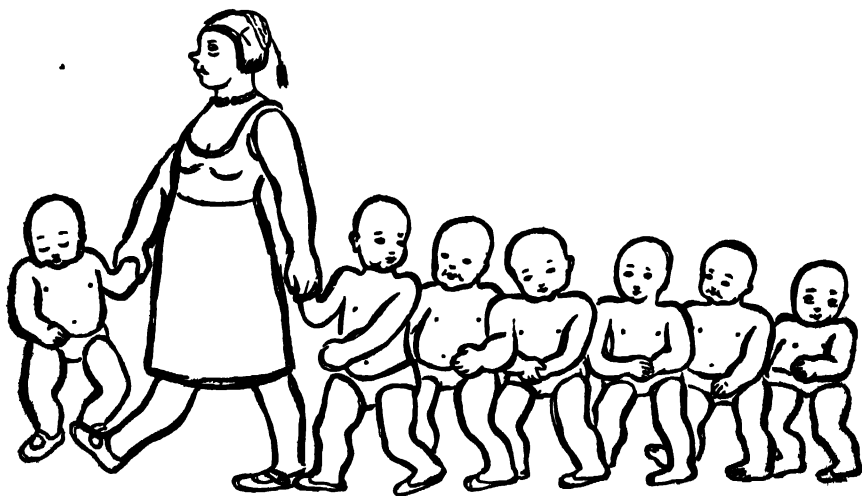
The film factories needed scenarios badly and appealed to our group. We decided to organise ourselves into units of five, each unit to work on a separate scenario. My group chose to write a scenario on the work of the kulaks in the factories . . . (this was in 1930 remember, when the problem was urgent). In the end it was left to me to do the whole job, and I did it, though my scenario was never produced owing to various difficulties at the studios, and being so topical it dated quickly and was soon useless. I never felt discouraged by misfires like this, though. There were so many interesting things bubbling up, and all the time I was nosing around keeping my eyes open and reading, reading, reading . . . *everything* I could lay my hands on.

1931. An important year for me. Why? Because there was an advertisement in the newspaper one day that G.I.K. (the long-

<sup>1</sup> Young Communists.

planned State Institute of Cinematography) had been organised in Moscow at last and was enrolling students. Shura and I made up our minds to join G.I.K. somehow. We were old pals, used to working together at the foundry and on scenarios and everything. We are still pals to-day and work together just the same as we did then.

Now we needed a permit from our factory film organisation to get us to G.I.K. There was no such film organisation in connection with our foundry, because Shura and me were the only two there who were keen on films. Up till now we had been working through another factory's Film and Photo Group. Well, we weren't going to be floored by a little thing like that. We immediately set to and organised a Film and Photo Group then and there for our own foundry and inscribed ourselves members right away. Within six weeks we got our permit from this Film Group to go to G.I.K.





Now as we were the two best workers in the smithy, ~~our~~ foundry didn't want to lose us. They appealed to us not to desert them for G.I.K. But we were mad about the films, and thought it just as important for our Socialist Fatherland to make good films as to make good machinery. As for me I was quite absolutely certain of my career at last. I wanted to be a producer. Shura and I sent several telegrams to G.I.K. before the important cable came back.

"COME AT ONCE."

We took this cable to the director of our foundry, but he still didn't want to let us go. So next free-day Shura and I just slipped off without his permission, took the train to Moscow, and tore round to G.I.K. We could hardly breathe for excitement. .

Being late, we had missed the formal entrance examination but they held a special one for us. This was the test.

A. How would you indicate that a restaurant had just been closed? *Material allowed*: four chairs and one table.

(I stood three of the chairs on the table and overturned the fourth on the floor.)

B. How would you show a sequence of a woman carrying water from an ice-covered river (through a hole pierced in the ice)? *Number of shots allowed*: four shots.

(I had the woman leaving her house, breathing out frozen air, for my first shot.)

(For the second shot I had her arriving at the frozen river and breaking a hole in the ice.)

(The third shot, she was carrying away the pail of water which was already beginning to freeze over.)

(And the fourth shot was the water-hole again covered with ice.)

G.I.K. accepted both of us.

Now we had to return to Leningrad . . . we had been away two days already. There was not a single ticket available at the station. All the trains to Leningrad that day were booked up solid. We were in a stew. By a miracle, however, some important official who was travelling back had to cancel his trip, so we were lucky and travelled back in style, soft class.

Our factory director wasn't at all reconciled to losing us, but our Trade Union backed us up. So, with a bit of wangling, we got ourselves back to Moscow.

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They were building Student City on the outskirts of Moscow, but it wasn't half ready yet. The hundred extra students waiting for it were accommodated in the meantime in a huge wooden barracks near by, in three long rows of iron cots.

Shura and I were to receive the official student stipend, free accommodation and our food at specially cheap rates.

There were students of thirty-seven different nationalities at G.I.K. . . . a lot of them very primitive, and most of them speaking no Russian. We found it a bit disturbing, did Shura and me, especially when some of the Caucasian students would start dancing the *Lezhinka* in the dormitory at three o'clock in the morning, or one of the Uzbeks would bring out his string lute and set up a mournful chanting before daybreak. There were heated discussions that went on for days and nights and kept us awake, between various lads and girls from the other side of the Georgian military highway and God knows where else, which we didn't

dare interrupt because these races are passionate as devils and they all carried knives in their belts.

Well, one fine day Shura and me and twenty-three other students took up our mattresses like Lazarus and besieged the half-built Student City. We camped in the Red Corner and refused to budge. So the director had to make the best of us and squeezed us in somewhere, five to a room. They were building madly all the time but there was never enough accommodation.

G.I.K. had already eight hundred students then, all studying hard to make up the gaps in their education and to catch up with the rest. Shura and me, we swotted political economy, dialectics and political history, day in and day out and coached each other as well as we could. I remember I was mad about Goya and Jack London then, both of whom I had just discovered. Our official lessons also included film theory and practice, languages, actual making of small film studies, physics, drawing, music and bio-mechanics. All the same, although we wrote a nice little scenario about the Donbas during the summer holidays, we didn't shine in our examination that first year, I can tell you.

Suddenly excitement spread through the Student City, like a great wind through the taiga. Eisenstein himself was coming back. He had been in Mexico and most of us had never seen him yet. And at last he came.

At once he started examining new students. I ached to catch a glimpse of him, but it wasn't easy. So one day I coaxed permission from the house-worker to carry the bottle of drinking water into his study in order to get a peep at the great man. Instead of the big gloomy fellow with a difficult temper I expected to see, there sat a small vivid creature with quick, light eyes, busy cracking jokes with the boys. I sat down quietly on a chair in the corner. Well, I was never able to sit still for long and presently I began

wriggling about as usual. Sergei Mikhailovitch noticed me and asked what I was doing in his study. I was very embarrassed and decided I'd bluff it out, so I shouted angrily:

"Well, Sergei Mikhailovitch, who do you think brought your water?" So everybody laughed and from then on I became Sergei Mikhailovitch's friend and student.

He started his lecture on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, I remember, with a tiny scrap of paper in his hand containing all his notes . . . the one word *Œdipus*. That was all he required. In that particular lecture he darted through the history of literature, with side-tracking and off-shoots that brought in Mickey Mouse, Richard the Third, Charlie Chaplin and the Matron of Ephesus, and all were inter-related and part of one whole thing.

We divided our kino-class into several groups that term, to study two scenes of *Julius Caesar*, and each group performed a scene as though on a real stage . . . the whole thing . . . from the *mise-en-scène* down to the smallest detail; compiling the fullest notes relating to everything that they did and why they did it and how they did it. Then each group discussed each other's performances. At the end of the session Sergei Mikhailovitch criticised all our criticisms and welded them all together in one constructive lecture. We learned an awful lot from that . . . and not only about *Julius Caesar* either.

What good days those were! Never shall I forget the brilliance of Comrade Eisenstein's first lectures to us on the theatre . . . simple, sparkling with humour, very warm and human. The Film Institute was then in its old headquarters . . . the Grand Café of Moscow which used to be the favourite night-club of the Tzarist military officers and the scene of their nightly gipsy debauches in the bad old style. It was just as they had left it, acres of fancy mirrors, gilt trimmings and red plush. It was all a

bit wilted and totally unheated . . . no proper discipline amongst the students, and hooliganism of a mild kind going on . . . cursing and fighting; except of course in the presence of Sergei Mikhailovitch. We were a tough lot on the whole you see. We slouched around in dirty sweaters and old flannel shirts. We hadn't anything else to slouch in then. Later on the Institute cleaned up, and so did we as times improved.

Sergei Mikhailovitch has immense knowledge not only of art and history but of most other subjects too, and he taught us to approach every problem we came up against carefully and profoundly like the good Marxist he is. What a marvellous teacher !



I can't explain to you how marvellous. The greatest thing he did for us, perhaps, was that he always brought out the desire in us for further study. It isn't only that Sergei Mikhailovitch has wide erudition you see . . . it is the fact that his erudition is simplified and illuminated by his brilliantly practical mind. He maintains that all art is related, including the art of the cinema. The great advantage of the cinema over the older arts is that the cinema, being the inheritor and result of all the arts that have gone before, is more visual and more dynamic. So you see it wasn't irrelevant that our class used to spend weeks for instance analysing Da Vinci's *Last Supper* . . . making sketches from it and working out dozens of different *mise-en-scènes* from a reproduction of the painting. Never have I worked harder nor with more satisfaction in my life than I did with Comrade Eisenstein. It was the logical sequel to my happy days in the foundry.

I wasn't so inexperienced in the studios now you see. I was already beginning to get a grip on practical difficulties. Sometimes I worked as assistant *régis seur*, then I had to organise *mise-en-scènes*, supervise all sorts of costumes, and things like that, and when our studios made *Counter-Plan*, we worked in two shifts and completed the whole film in eighty days.

Our class working with Eisenstein was just beginning to nibble away at the outer edges of the pancake of knowledge. We were beginning to realise what a lot there was to know and how to begin to learn to understand. Sergei Mikhailovitch himself always lead the chase after knowledge. Never in my life have I come across anyone who was so anxious to know, and to share what he knew. For this reason he made a magnificent teacher, and I do believe even to-day he would sooner teach than produce, although he is the best *régis seur* in Russia and must be one of the best in the world. Not that I have seen many European films,

although we do get the best of them here . . . the Chaplins and René Clairs and Disneys and scientific films.

Anyway, I want to say right away that I am indebted to Sergei Mikhailovitch for all I have in my mind that is worth having and for all the good work I may ever turn out. I was a sprawling, untidy devil before I knew him—full of half-digested heroics and ambitions. It was he who taught me to be punctual and thorough and to prepare my lessons carefully. You can understand the character of our comrade when I tell you that he can ignore stupidity but laziness enrages him.

Sergei Mikhailovitch had an individual attitude to each separate student . . . it was his manner of getting the best out of every one of us. He came round to Student City to see we had good accommodation and proper facilities for study, and he helped each of us through the personal problems in our lives. Nothing that concerned us was too big nor too small for him to tackle. He was like a father to us, a nice genial father. The rest of his students can tell you themselves, but speaking for Oleg Zacharievitch I can tell you right off that Sergei Mikhailovitch has got me to give out the best of myself more than anyone else in my whole life.

1934. I was getting on fine now. So was Shura. When G.I.K. was ordered to send a Film Train to Perm in Siberia we were sent along to help as part of our practical work. A Film Train you know is a moving kino unit, built and equipped so as to be able to shoot as well as project, and assembled for the purpose of bringing useful propaganda to far parts of the country where there are no cinemas and the people are backward and uncultured. Our mammoth airship, the *Maxim Gorki*, was built on the same principle. It is ambulatory education.

This Film Train was being sent to Perm to help in the big drive for efficient transport, because the railway there was very badly

run and it was our job to see it was put into better shape.

Before we started off for Perm we spent a month shooting a film of a model railway being properly organised and efficiently run. This "short" we took with us when we set off.

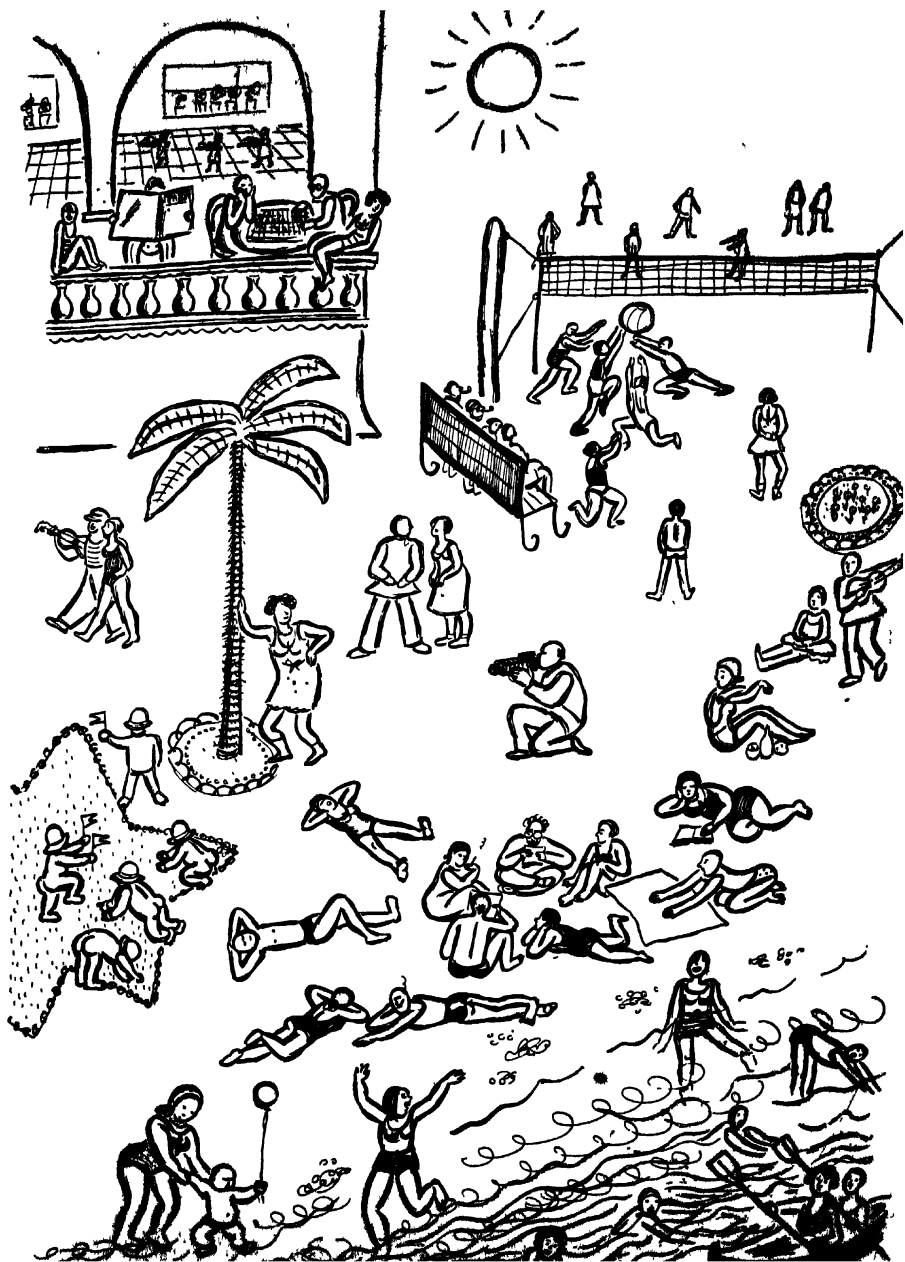
Our Film Train had five cars, with two people to a compartment. The first car was for the director and his secretary, and was fitted up as an office. The second car contained the dining-room, a small library and radio, a photo-laboratory, our club, and at the end the kitchen. The third car was used entirely for printing and developing, the fourth for sleeping-cars and the fifth carried a printing shop and an extra little room for cutting.

There was immense excitement when we steamed into Perm, where the local people were expecting us. We piled in right away, gave film shows and lectures every day to enormous meetings of railway workers. We issued our own daily newspaper for free distribution and also took day-to-day shots of actual conditions at Perm to show up the shortcomings that were holding up efficiency. We did it this way. We illustrated a lot of popular Russian proverbs with real incidents and real people from the everyday life of the railway. It was great fun and the most successful method of propaganda you could wish for.

We spent four months altogether with our Film Train, and when we left Perm the railway workers gave us a grand send-off banquet in the forest. We organised a special crèche for that day so that all the mothers could come to the banquet too. It was very exciting. Music, speeches, toasts—aeroplanes above dropping leaflets and all.

It wasn't long after I came back from Perm that I met Veruchka. Veruchka was a nice little girl from Kazakstan. She was a student in G.I.K. too. She worked in the engineering department, studying film costing. Well, Veruchka and I took to each other and got





married within a month. You know Veruchka, don't you? She is the little girl with short hair and a snub nose I always go about with. That's my wife Veruchka. She isn't here in Student City just now. She had to go off to Leningrad to do her three month's practical work. But I'll join her there when I've taken my diploma in three months' time. I'm working on the scenario now. Then we'll march in the May Day Demonstration together in Leningrad and dance in the Nevski Prospekt and see all the illuminations on the Neva together.

Next summer our class was off again, this time to the beautiful Ukraine of my childhood, with Sergei Mikhailovitch, shooting scenes for his new film, *Bezhin Lug*. We had a grand life that summer, worked like hell and lived on the farms.

We had a funny thing happen to us when we were doing some special shots of the village church. We had a lot of valuable ikons (lent us specially for our church sequences), all thickly studded with jewels. Presently we began to notice that the jewels in these ikons, which were left every night for safety in charge of the priest, were gradually disappearing. Every morning when we came to start work there would be another few jewels missing. Well, in the end we made an enquiry and suspicion fell on the village priest in charge of them. We went very cautiously, him being a holy man, but soon afterwards he got himself into an awful scandal with a young girl in the village, and when he came up before the local village court the whole story came out. He *had* taken the jewels.

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

Veruchka and I have a room to ourselves in Student City now and live pretty well. We both get our student stipend of 150 roubles a month, with extra grants for producing and work like

that, so we have over four hundred between us, sometimes a lot more. When I'm a director I shall start from eight hundred roubles a month with a percentage from the films I produce in addition. But we are getting on fine and don't need any more money really.

Well, there you are. I'm not the snotty-nosed hooligan that used to run around Tsarskoe Selo any more you see. I shave almost every day now like the English tourists and wear smart suits and European collars like Sergei Mikhailovitch.

I've been pretty lucky in my life, one way and another, and



always gone bang after what I've wanted. In our country you can, if what you want isn't to exploit other folks. It's my Pioneer and Komsomol training that have helped to give me a realistic attitude towards life and that's what helps a lot. I am Komsomol Organiser now in my class at G.I.K. Veruchka is a Komsomol too, of course. I'm twenty-four now. I'm pretty strong too, although I'm still lanky as you see. And I'm pretty healthy except I get knocked sideways every so often when my spine goes wrong . . . it's a sort of weakness that attacks it and comes, I believe, from the famine times when us kids couldn't get the right diet to make our bones hold together properly. When I get ill, I have to lie up for several days and Veruchka looks after me fine; one hundred per cent practical and efficient, that's our little Veruchka. Then I'm up again. Can wrestle and box and do everything.

\* \* \* \* \*

I'm not afraid of death all the same. Only I do hope it will be a useful one when I do die . . . I've had so many narrow squeaks I've got used to it . . . but I should hate to die stupidly through falling under a train or something like that.

I'm never sorry for any of the things I do, mind you, even when they aren't so good. It's all useful. I like to set myself a goal and then go to it all out.

I am studying very hard now and I know exactly what my first very own production will be. It's been in my head ever since I left the smithy. It'll be a lyrical film about the development of people. What I mean by lyrical is "not literal"—that is to say a *heightening* of reality into poetic expression. I want to graduate very well and start right away on this film. I want to put all I've got into it—it'll be me. I'm not satisfied yet of course, either with my work

or with myself. I'd like to be a bit more modest, for instance . . . well I'll tell you a story about that. . . .

You know when the Moscow metro was being built the G.I.K. graduation class took patronage over Shaft 59. We used to go down the diggings in the Leningradski Chaussée on our free day and work in a brigade, helping them haul the dirt and singing in chorus as we hauled. It was very jolly. We enjoyed ourselves fine. Then we helped them organise their wall-newspaper. And they helped us with our practical problems too. I worked down there with Nina Petrovna in the Komsomol cell of Shaft 59. She is a hefty worker, a nice girl, and modest too. Why at that dance in the evening she kept her scarf over her Order of the Banner of Labour so that I didn't even know till afterwards that she was an order bearer. What do you think of that ?

★   ★   ★   ★   ★

I want to grow into a real Bolshevik . . . to have breadth of vision, firmness and profundity in all I do. As to my personal life, well it isn't divorced from my social life. I'm a member of the Kino Workers' Trade Union and a candidate for the Party. I am getting the things I want nicely. It's just one straight road forward now. Veruchka and me and our Komsomol organisation and G.I.K. and our great Russian Republics. I'll do my military service for two years after I graduate. By that time the new Film City will be built, and Veruchka and I will have an apartment there. We have planned everything out. We shall have three children, two boys and one girl would be all right I think, but I'd like two girls and one boy just as well. Then Father and Mother and all our relations will come and visit us, and Grandma will cluck all over the place and we shall all be very very happy.



*Nina Petrovna*









## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

NINA PETROVNA	.	.	.	.	metro worker
FATHER	.	.	.	.	peasant of White Russia
MOTHER	.	.	.	.	peasant of White Russia
MAKAR PETROVITCH	.	.	.	.	their eldest son
SASHA PETROVITCH	.	.	.	.	the youngest son
STEPAN NIKOLEYEVITCH	.	.	.	.	Nina's fiancé
FEDOR SEMYONOVITCH	.	.	.	.	Nina's husband
DOOSIA VINOGRADOVA	.	.	.	.	cotton weaver
MARIA DEMCHENKO	.	.	.	.	Collective farmer
MAROOSIA VINOGRADOVA	.	.	.	.	cotton weaver
KALININ	.	.	.	.	President of U.S.S.R



## *Nina Petrovna*

**N**INA PETROVNA was born near the Polish border in the little village of Domantovichi in White Russia. The village was forty kilometres away from the nearest railway, and had no school at all. There were seven of them in Nina's family. Father, a peasant, Mother, and the five children. Nina was next to the youngest. They lived in two rooms furnished with a table, a couple of wooden benches and a few truckle-beds.

The earliest memories of Nina Petrovna's life are the Polish Raids on Domantovichi, when cattle were destroyed wholesale and all the farm buildings and peasant huts gutted by fire by the Poles swooping down on them from over the border.

Nina's eldest brother Makar Petrovitch was a shepherd boy, though he desired above all else to be able to study. But as there was no hope of such a luxury he used to beg for the cast-off text-books from the son of the village priest, who was being educated for the priesthood. With these spread around him, he sat all day in the warm fields, knotting his forehead in the effort to puzzle out for himself the letters of the alphabet in order to be

able to learn to read, whilst the cattle in his charge browsed idly about him. And at last, after a primitive fashion, he succeeded.

What especially enticed him was mathematics, and he was unable to tear himself away from any kind of figures and geometrical problems. But what was the good? There was no one to teach him how. He was the eldest son of poor peasants and education was as far above his station as the stars.

But the Great War came. And then the 1917 Revolution. After the depredations of the Poles the Reds were joyfully received in Domantovichi and it was in the Red Army that Makar got the chance he had dreamed of all his childhood, the chance to study mathematics. It wasn't an idle whim either, his passion for calculations, because it soon became obvious that Makar had the making of a gifted mathematician. Helped and encouraged by his cultural classes in the Red Army, he rapidly bettered his qualifications as soon as the Civil War lessened in intensity.

When Father died in 1922, Makar was well on the way to becoming an important engineer. And in order to give him every chance to develop his talent, the Soviet Government sent him to America for two years to study bridge construction with the biggest engineering firms. There he worked intensely hard, and when he returned was sent to work on the construction of Dnieprostroi, the great new dam over the River Dnieper.

1924. Makar came to Domantovichi to visit his family, saw that Nina was not getting on very well, and decided to take her back with him to Moscow. Nina was glad to go with him though she was frightened of the journey. In the first place she had never seen a train before and the railway station terrified her, so that despite Makar's bluff reassurances her heart palpitated like a rabbit in a trap. When their train arrived at Minsk, Nina was overcome by the vastness of the city.

Nina was dressed in her village dress, the only one she had, gathered skirt of dark blue homespun which reached down to her ankles, a clumsy blouse of pink linen, and an overcoat made from a soldier's greatcoat, roughly cut down but with long sleeves still flapping a good twelve inches below her fingers. Her feet were bare. Her long fair hair was tied up in a white kerchief.

Makar took her by the hand and off they went on a shopping expedition to buy some new clothes. Makar bought her snug-fitting leather boots, long thread stockings, all manner of fine new clothes, and had her long tresses cut short in the new fashion. Nina was overcome by so much change. She felt awkward in the slippery laced boots and undressed without her long hair. She couldn't understand how to manipulate the new hair-ribbon at all because she had never seen one before in her life. And that wasn't the only difficulty. In the hotel at Minsk they served meat for dinner. Actually meat. Nina had lived on black bread, potatoes and sour milk all her twelve years and had never seen anyone eat meat before. During the whole of the fortnight they spent in Minsk she handled the shining knife and fork with awe and a certain amount of terror.

And that was only Minsk. They were on their way to an even bigger and busier city. They were going to Moscow where the Kremlin was, where the Tzar of all the Russias used to live. The people in Moscow spoke Russian, a foreign language of which she knew not one word.

The wonders of Moscow were overcast for her by the perplexities of her new hair-ribbon. She couldn't understand how to tie it, and Makar, though he knew his way intimately about the intricacies of flanged girders and cross bracing, couldn't make head or tail of a simple bow with two loops either. So Nina Petrovna was obliged to trot every day to their neighbour and say, "Auntie,

God bless you, will you be so kind as to tie my hair-ribbon?" But at last the clever Makar solved this knotty problem too, for he came home one evening with a present of a hair-comb in his pocket and that was the end of all the troubles with the hair-ribbon.

Her mind relieved of this heavy anxiety, Nina Petrovna was now sent to school. It was an astonishingly large school. She had never seen so many children before in her life. They teased her at first because she could only speak White Russian. She shared lodgings near the Commune Ploshad with her brother Makar, and soon applied to the Pioneers for membership. She was very happy with the Pioneers. They helped her to learn to speak Russian and they helped her in her studies and in her games. She made many new friends and in the summer of 1925 went off with





ninety-nine other Pioneers to the Crimea for three months' holiday by the glittering Black Sea.

School days passed briskly. When she was seventeen she was transferred from the Pioneers to the Young Communist organisation, and in the following year graduated from the seventh class at school.

She was anxious to learn constructional engineering, so she entered the Transport Section Technicum for Railway Construction. This wasn't at all according to plan, because Mother had said to her before she left home to go to Moscow:

"Don't you worry Ninushka, what you will be is an agriculturalist of course." But Makar wanted her to be an engineer. She thought it over and decided it would be more interesting to build things on top of the ground like Makar instead of making things grow out of the ground as her father had done.

So she started step by step to learn constructional engineering from the very beginning, doing practical work along with theory. The first practical jobs she was given were the simplest manual labour, carrying planks of wood and loads of earth. Nina was twenty now and a brigade leader.

For her practical work in the second term she was sent all the way up to Siberia, where three hundred kilometres north of Kazan they were building a road. She was given the job of arranging all the meetings so that she should get experience in organisational work. Construction went with a swing. She was very strong and healthy and the life suited her admirably.

Makar, going from success to success, was already an Order-bearer and a famous personality among the engineers who were changing the face of Russia, making arid tracts soft with water, and causing gracious new cities to appear on the steppes with magical swiftness . . . changing the course of ancient rivers, and

spanning raging torrents with delicately drawn girders stronger than steel.

It was a very proud Nina who was ordered for the second part of her graduation test to assist her brother Makar in the concrete-laying for the mighty new bridge over the Dnieper, not far from Dnieprostoi.

There was a certain engineer working there named Stepan Nikoleyevitch, a friend of Makar who was popular with everybody. Nina no sooner saw him than she fell in love with him. Her peasant reserve caused her much anguish, for she wanted to let him know her feelings before the construction was finished and they scattered. They walked and talked in between work and at last made a plan. He lived in Sverdlovsk, Nina in Moscow. The plan was that if she still wanted to marry him she should join him in Sverdlovsk the following January. If not it meant she didn't want to.

Back in Moscow, she got through her examination creditably, and in 1933 graduated.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the Technicum she had sighed along with all the other students, girls and boys alike, to work on the Moscow metro construction. It had been the dream of all their young lives. Now her chance came, and she seized it eagerly. She was taken on as a brigade leader at one of the early diggings. They were tunnelling the earth to lay the foundations. It was slow work, because they had to dislodge many old houses and rotten cellars as they dug (left behind like stubborn, infected roots when bad teeth are clumsily extracted). Then when the ground was cleaned out, they quickly knocked together wooden houses to accommodate their own metro workers. Machinery was installed to excavate

to the required depth. It was not suitable work for girls, this part of the job, as they had to work in compressed air, and all women were forbidden to take part in it. But Nina could not bear the thought of leaving her own brigade to another person's charge. She felt herself to be healthy and pleaded and pleaded for permission to continue her job. She tackled many different doctors and got so many medical notes certifying to her robust constitution that at last the authorities yielded to her pleadings. Down the shaft she went, with her brigade of eight men.

Until she got used to it, even she found the work hard. They had to tunnel out a hole five metres in diameter and cement it in place, working all the time in artificial air which constantly induced a strange kind of headache like having a tight cold in the head. It was through these holes that all the materials required



for the construction were carried below. Every ten days each person engaged on this part of the construction was medically examined. Before long that part of the work was completed, and they began the really interesting work on the shaft itself. The shaft led to Komsomol Square adjoining the three railway stations of Kazanski, Syevernai and Oktyabrski.

It was January already. How could she get away to Sverdlovsk? She was needed urgently on her job and was busy on social work every spare moment. She didn't want to lose her man either, so she sat down and wrote him a long letter explaining the situation. No reply came.

*Shaft 24.* She was leading wholly inexperienced workers. They contrived, by sending a few of them at a time to work in other shafts with more experienced workers and on their return spreading them out amongst the newest recruits, to show them how the job should be tackled. By this method of pooling knowledge and exercising mobility no time was lost and the level of technical skill increased from day to day.

But untrained labour was by no means the worst difficulty they had to conquer in the construction of the Moscow metro. The ground beneath Moscow is swampy and treacherous, and at one point, Shaft 24 lay directly through a river-bed. This had to be drained at first, then blocked in and finally cemented. During the floods the waters broke through before the cement had been applied. By mere chance Nina Petrovna happened to be above the ground when the accident happened. Three of the workers in Shaft 24 were immediately up to their necks in the torrent of falling earth, and more earth was falling around them.

Nina dashed to the rescue with the chief engineer and a brigade of strong labourers, supporting the heavy pressure of earth from the outside. The three workers were all safely extricated. Two

were very soon themselves again, though the third had to spend a month in hospital.

It was the first accident on the metro construction and upset them all for a moment.

When Shaft 24 was complete, it had to be made waterproof and cemented throughout. The entire shaft was divided into ten sections for the better organisation of this work, and Nina Petrovna was appointed brigade leader to one of these ten sections. After the initial difficulties had been conquered her brigade was working so smoothly that they were soon three days' work ahead of the other nine brigades. There were day and night shifts. The work never stopped all the twenty-four hours. And when Shaft 24 was completed Nina was sent by the Transport Workers' Union for a six weeks' holiday to Sochi in the Caucasus.

There she swam, ate, slept, read, started to learn to play the guitar and made many friends. She basked in the burning sun, went for long walks in the mountains and completely cured the slight twinge of rheumatism she had contracted working in the damp metro diggings. She grew brown and her skin glistened.

No word from Stepan Nikoleyevitch. She was hurt by his silence but too reserved to confide in anyone.

Well, at Sochi there was one young man, Fedor Semyonovitch, who followed her around with dog-like fidelity. He was tall and slender with the soft, rather effeminate hair that appeals to so many women. He implored Nina to marry him. Nina liked him well enough but wouldn't pledge herself. But he pleaded and pleaded until at last she gave way. A man's tears always broke down her resistance. She would have said anything to stop them. They unnerved her. And marry him she did before she returned from her holiday. He was an engineer too, but of a totally different nature from the other one. He came from Moscow; he was

affectionate, clinging and a bit weak in character. He followed her everywhere and tried not to show his ready jealousy when she spoke to anyone. Nina was fundamentally reserved as only a Russian peasant can be, but she had spent the important years of her life in Soviet youth organisations and had learned to give out freely.

It was impossible not to be fond of anyone so devoted as Fedor, but it was equally impossible to feel a great love for him. She was happy, not very happy, but happy enough. They returned to Moscow together.

1935. Nina was at work on Shaft 51, the second line of the



metro. Work was much easier for all of them because they had gained so much experience already in Shaft 24. Started in July, the new Shaft 51 was complete in September. Again Nina went south for another lovely holiday by the Black Sea.

On her return to Moscow there was an announcement in *Pravda* that she was to receive the award of the Order of the Red Banner of Labour for her outstanding work in the metro digging. She was overcome with confusion as much as with pride.

And at last a word from Stepan, a cable of congratulation. She was upset with excitement and couldn't analyse her own feelings. Perhaps he had never received her letter after all? And now it was too late.

In due course there was the investiture at the Kremlin. Along with Doosia and Maroosia Vinogradova who by working on 144 looms instead of the normal 16 to 24 looms, had broken all records for cotton spinning, and Maria Demchenko who had produced 800 centners of sugar-beet, she sat in the great hall in the brilliantly-lit Kremlin. With flashlights popping and cameras clicking and the thunder of clapping hands and stamping feet in her burning ears, she walked up to the Tribune to shake hands with the blunt-faced, genial man with the heavy black moustache, and have the shining Order pinned on the breast of her best blue silk dress with the lace collar by Comrade Kalinin, President of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

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The story got about. After *Pravda* had carried it, many other Soviet papers ran it too, and presently it got into the foreign Press. Reproductions of her good-humoured peasant face with

the smiling, narrow eyes and the long upper lip, began to appear in all sorts of magazines, and other reproductions taken from those, and others taken from those until the likeness to Nina Petrovna was of the dimmest, and but for the name underneath, even she would not have known who the picture was meant to be. And after that, floods of letters began to pour in on her from France, from Germany even, from England, from Czecho-Slovakia and from America, as well as hundreds from all corners of Russia. Nina was taken aback at first at her extraordinary popularity. But when she gradually ploughed her way through the letters from abroad, all of which had been carefully translated for her by her Trade Union Cultural Secretary, she began to understand why so many people wanted to reach out to an unknown girl so far away from them. The letters were of all kinds, some gay, some sad, some querulous, some admiring. Not a few contained proposals of marriage, and one or two were poems in the heroic manner.

But the majority of the letters, especially those from abroad, were from women who demanded to know how she worked, and seemed to breathe envy of her responsible job in every line. She had once met Romain Rolland at a reception in honour of Maxim Gorki and she had seen motor coaches of surprised-looking tourists tearing past Theatre Square. Apart from these encounters Nina knew nothing of foreign countries. It appeared from the letters that the majority of women who wrote in such terms were all well-to-do, mostly married, some with children. They seemed to be bored and irritated by having nothing important to do, and what they expressed was as much surprise at the cheerfulness of her young face as at the unusual nature of her work.

Some of the saddest of the letters were not from women like this but from the wives of unemployed men in the foreign coun-



tries, and not a few piteous documents came from unemployed labourers from France, England and America.

\* \* \* \* \*

She was now sent to work in Shaft 82, the new line that runs to the Leningradski Chaussée. There was no river-bed foundation here to be filled up, but instead a chalk foundation which had to be dynamited. Not a single accident occurred this time. The entire shift was composed of young Communists who worked intelligently and with an overpowering common will that swept all difficulties aside and made the work fly. Nina Petrovna's shift again beat all the other shifts for good and rapid work. She was the only woman brigade leader on the job. Indeed, there were only two other women altogether working in Shaft 82 and both on the pumping machines.

Shaft 82 was under the special patronage of the Young Communists of G.I.K.,<sup>1</sup> and students from that organisation often came over on free-day when there was special work to be done. Nina Petrovna did a lot of work with a very tall, thin lad named Oleg Zacharievitch, who had slanting blue eyes, a comic turned-up nose and an untidy tousle of pale yellow hair. He was bursting with ideas and energy and was inclined to be boastful. He had a nice little wife too, named Veruchka, with whom he seemed to be on the best of terms. Nina liked the pair of them and danced a great deal with Oleg when G.I.K. entertained the metro workers to a party one evening. Fedor said nothing, but instead of asking Veruchka to dance, sat and scowled at Oleg all the evening.

<sup>1</sup> State Institute of Cinematography.

It was stupid and no way to behave. Fedor swam uneasily in the current of Nina's fame, less modest than she, half enjoying it and half resenting it. When he escorted her to the opera he always looked at her more than at the stage. Was it love? Or was it jealousy? She couldn't tell. Was it so difficult to live near her because of all this tiresome publicity? She herself was not enjoying it any more because it was threatening to interfere with her studies. After all, her brother Makar was far more famous than she would ever be and she had never let that fact upset her. If Fedor had been in the Party, perhaps he might have behaved differently. Still he was very sweet and tender with her. She had



no tangible grievances. She decided that as soon as they could plan it comfortably she would have a baby. She was getting on for twenty-four and it was time she started her family.



Nina Petrovna is again in charge of a brigade of eight men. As a member of the Young Communist Committee for the Shaft she is responsible for the theoretical training of the workers in her group, and it is also her duty to make out their wage sheets and time sheets.

She earns a good salary, about five hundred roubles a month, often more, for bonuses for good work come her way frequently beside premiums for economies.

She keeps her treasured Order pinned on her blue silk dress, which she only wears for best.

She lives in a clean little room near the Commune Ploshad, not far from the lodgings where she and Makar used to live. In one corner stands a snow-white bed, covered with a fancy lace coverlet. A small dressing-table, with many bottles of scent, a big wooden wardrobe with the usual glass panel, a radio, a few chairs, a round table where her youngest brother Sasha is studying German. On the papered walls several scent-sachets hang by twisted silken cords. A few family photographs.

She works very hard on her job amongst the pipes and rails and hammers in steaming muddy metro shafts, and after work, in her Young Communist Organisation. She is very proud of the completed lines of the metro with their gleaming marble perspectives and soft flood-lighting. When she is up to her knees in water in Shaft 82, rubber boots to her thighs over coarse black overalls,

and a great loose hat like a cabbage leaf tied on over her pretty fair hair, she looks ahead and sees herself next year in a smart autumn suit and silk stockings and carefully manicured fingernails, passing through the imposing entrance of the completed Leningradski Chaussée Metro Station, and she continues her work rhythmically and patiently.

The letters still pour in. She has decided to squeeze in time to answer them all. For her life is so straightforward and direct, even the misadventure with Stepan has not shaken her deeply. She feels she knows just where she is in the world and what she has to do. She will complete her brigade work with the Moscow metro when Shaft 82 finishes in 1937, then she will take a year off to study engineering, improve her qualifications, and learn some languages. Then she will be sent out again on one of the big new enterprises somewhere in the vast land, to Turkmenia perhaps, or to the far north, or somewhere out on the steppes, always building, building. . . .

*Nura Tash Muchamedov*









## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

NURA TASH MUCHAMEDOV	a Siberian Tatar boy musician
PROFESSOR WOLFMAN	Professor of violin at the Moscow Conservatoire, Nura's teacher
NUR SARRIEV	} . pupils of the violin at the Moscow Conservatoire
BRUCHANOVA	
BUSSIA GOLDSTEIN	
FRITZ HECKERT . . .	German Revolutionary, member of Comintern Executive, friend of Karl Liebknecht
KAGANOVITCH . . .	Chief of Transport



## *Nura Tash Muchamedov*

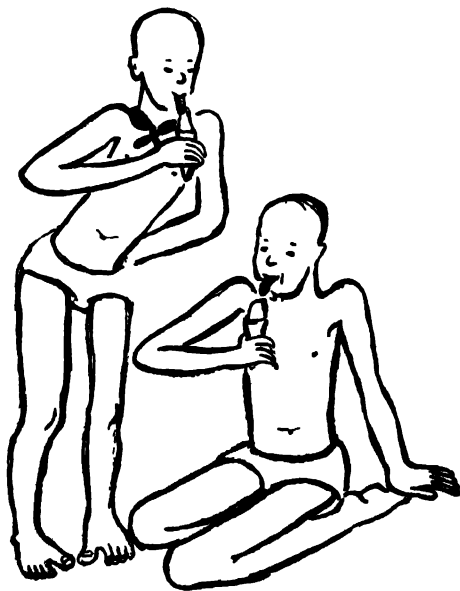
ONE WINTER'S EVENING last year several of us, professors at the Moscow Conservatoire, were holding a meeting in one of the smaller rest-rooms on the second floor. Suddenly the knob rattled and a diminutive figure poked his head round the door. Before we could say a word a strange-looking object scuffled round the door and came right in. It was a little boy, dark-haired and olive-skinned with bright slit eyes. His head was no higher than the door handle. He was very dirty, dressed in an amazing collection of bedraggled sheep-skins, with coarse felt boots, much too big for him, on his feet. In his hand he carried a curious instrument that looked like some sort of fiddle.

This little boy shuffled up to the big table round which we were sitting . . . and without addressing a word to us, tucked the odd-looking instrument under his chin and started to play. He played a wailing Tatar melody all in semi-tones. We waited silently till he had finished. He could hardly speak any Russian, this little boy, but appeared to be passionately eager to be allowed to come and study at the Conservatoire. How he got past the

porters we never discovered, but anyway he was handed over to me to be given an oral test, which he got through so creditably that it was decided to admit him to the Conservatoire right away.

That was my first meeting with Nura Tash Muchamedov. He was put into my class. I am Professor Wolfman and I specialise in teaching children from the national minorities. And this is the story my new pupil told me bit by bit.

He was born in 1922 in the village of Gortar Atak, about 350 kilometres from Omsk in Siberia. His family were Siberian Tatars and there was a little Mussulman mosque in their village. When his father and mother, who had both worked on the Collective timber farm there, died, the family of two brothers and one sister broke up. The sisters went to work on the Collective and the



brother in the timber-yards. Nura Tash Muchamedov went to live with his eldest sister. His only companion was a dog called Pirat.

Nura's brother used to amuse himself by playing on the Siberian fiddle, and because he was lonely Nura tried to make himself a little fiddle too, out of bits of wood he found lying about the farmyard, copying his brother's fiddle as well as he could. The strings were a great problem. In the end he used strings off an old balalaika, and he made himself quite a creditable bow from a bit of a stick and some horse-hair plucked from the tail of one of the farm horses.

With this home-made fiddle he used to play all sorts of tunes he picked up, and he made up other tunes for himself. He played at all the Collective farm concerts and was very popular. But he wanted to learn how to play properly. So one morning, just after his twelfth birthday, he tucked his fiddle under his arm, slipped off, and stowed away on the train going to Omsk. On the train he played to the passengers who gave him some kopecks and advised him to go to Kazan if he wanted to study properly.

The problem was how to get himself to Kazan in order to get his musical education. So he took his fiddle and made a tour of all the restaurants and saloons, playing to the diners and to the drunkards. He must have got himself into pretty low dives, I think, in Omsk because he was very ashamed when he came to this part of his story. But Nura is a very truthful child and concealed nothing from me. Well, altogether he collected seventy roubles in Omsk. With this money he got himself to Kazan, where he expected all would now be simple and that his musical education was as good as arranged.

But the Kazan authorities, instead of admitting him to the School of Music, scolded him for playing truant, wrote him out a free pass for the return railway journey and sent him back to Omsk

But Nura was determined to go on with his quest. Instead of using his pass to go back to Omsk as they had bidden, he stowed away in another train bound for Moscow.

On the long journey to Moscow he fell into conversation with some Red Army soldiers, one of whom spoke a little Tatar. They were intrigued with his playing and advised him to apply to the Conservatoire. When he got to Moscow he decided to go cautiously. He thought it was probably full of thieves. Someone took him to the Departmental District of Education, and while he was sitting patiently in the ante-room there waiting to see the director, an inspector with a beard and spectacles was so taken by him that he wanted to adopt him. But Nura didn't wait. It had dawned on him that where he was was not the Conservatoire, so he fled from the Department of Education and somehow made his way here. I don't know how he did it. He spoke only Tatar and Turkmenian. He couldn't speak a word of Russian. All he had was the one word "Conservatoire" scribbled on a bit of paper for him by his Red Army friends, and his little fiddle under his arm. But get here he did, to interrupt our peaceful Professors' meeting that winter's night.

Four days afterwards we sent him to live in the big house of Pioneers near Grusinskaya where he could be properly looked after whilst he got his musical education.

He found his level there very quickly, and had soon exchanged his dirty sheep-skins for a nice clean tunic and Pioneer neckerchief. The doctor reported his health excellent, and the teacher in charge of his education reported that he was making good his deficiency, doing especially well at geometry and geography. He learned Russian rapidly. All children pick up languages easily of course, but musical children seem to pick them up even quicker. It was droll to see my small protégé within an amazingly short

time express himself in fluent Russian with a Moscow accent as clean as a whistle.

Well, when I started to teach him the violin I found that Nura could play Tatar melodies by ear very well, but that he didn't know a single note of music by name. He had never seen a piano before even. I began by giving him little pieces to play right away . . . Gluck and Schumann. He soon learned to read music and then he used to wander off and browse in the music shops on Tverskaya and buy little pieces for himself. He was especially fond of Bach Minuets. He had pocket money, of course, because he was receiving the special stipend of three hundred roubles a month from the Conservatoire, administered for him by his Pioneer organisation.

He had an exquisitely true ear, distinguished quarter tones quite easily but, like all Orientals, had at first no idea of European



rhythm. I found it very difficult to teach him rhythm, but I did it gradually by playing real pieces of music to him and teaching him to play them the same way. Never any exercises.

Nura was a charming little person. He had a delicate, serious nature and natural good taste, and he could discipline himself when he wanted to. At the beginning he was so excited by Moscow and all the new things flooding in on him that he neglected his work a bit. I put in a quiet word to his Pioneer leader, who had a talk with him and from that moment Nura was a model pupil.

You must remember that he had been wandering about Siberia as a waif for many months before he came to us. He must have drunk vodka and gambled and used gutter language quite freely during those months. But he adapted himself as quickly to a cultured life as though he had never known any other. His uncouth expressions dropped away by themselves and we didn't even have to tell him it wasn't polite to address his teachers in the second person singular. It occurred to him without any prompting from us, and he stopped doing so of his own accord after he had been with us a week.

But for all his sweet nature and sympathetic ways, Nura is very strong-minded. When Thibault came to Moscow recently to give a series of concerts, Nura was longing to go. Well, we have an iron rule you know, that Pioneers mustn't attend evening concerts unless specially arranged for them. We can't allow the children up as late as eleven and twelve at night. Nura knew about this rule perfectly well, but he was crazy to hear my old master Thibault. Imagine my astonishment when I looked around the great hall of the Conservatoire, which was absolutely packed. There in the stalls, not far away from me, sat Nura and another little boy crammed together into one seat, absolutely motionless, listening to the music as though the rest of the world had ceased to exist.





He knew well enough, the rascal, that he would be hauled over the coals for breaking the rule, but he had evidently decided it was worth it.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I myself was born in Kiev twenty-six years ago and sent by the Government to complete my musical education abroad. I travelled all over America and Europe and was first a pupil at the Paris Conservatoire, then assistant to Thibault. It was there that I met my wife. She was a pupil of Cortot. She is Mexican. She can't speak Russian very well yet, so we speak French to each other.

On my return to Russia I was appointed to a Professorship here at the Moscow Conservatoire. I like teaching music to children, and am particularly interested in children from our national minorities.

There is such a wealth of latent talent in our country. We are unearthing it every day. Naturally we are eager to develop it and see that it gets every chance of expression. I have some interesting little pupils here now in my violin class. That is a Turkmenian boy of twelve, named Nur Sarriev. He plays entirely on Turkmen instruments and already composes charming music. I have only had him two months. He is a pupil of great promise. That fair-haired little girl in the corner, putting away her violin, is Bruchanova. She is Siberian Yakutsk, very gifted. Her father is just an ordinary chauffeur. Kaganovitch, our Chief of Transport, got interested in her and had her brought to me. She plays Mozart enchantingly. We find, on the whole, that the Jewish children seem to have special gifts of execution, violin especially. It is curious that so many of these prodigies like Outiosov, our Soviet jazz composer, seem to come from Odessa. There used to be a bad tradition of musical prodigies and gangsters from Odessa, you know. Before the Revolution Odessa specialised in cramming-shops for precocious Jewish musical prodigies. Now that is all swept away, but we still have many extraordinary talented musicians from there. Music runs in the family very often. We are all very proud of Bussia Goldstein, of course, our star pupil to-day, who comes from Odessa. All *his* family are musicians. Bussia will most certainly become one of the greatest violinists of our time. He is already an outstandingly brilliant executant with the deepest musical sensibility. Nothing is impossible for him. He is very hard-working and conscientious, and has an amazingly strong character. That of a born leader. He is a strong, healthy, well-grown boy. You have heard him no doubt at the children's concerts. He plays Beethoven. He and Nura are very friendly, though Bussia is two years older.

All our pupils here lead a simple and normal life. Bussia goes

skating and ski-ing with the other boys and girls, has his Pioneer holidays in Artek in the Crimea, and is treated exactly like everybody else, of course. He is very popular amongst the other pupils here. They are the first to feel an outstanding personality amongst so many gifted children. I can prophesy safely that the concert halls of the world will be thronged to hear him in a few years' time.

I should describe my pupil Nura Tash Muchamedov as a good specimen of a normal, gifted child. He is neither a genius nor a prodigy. He is thirteen now. In three years' time he will finish school. Then he will go on to the Musical Technicum for another three or four years. After he has completed his training at the Technicum he will return here to the Conservatoire to complete his musical education. If he shows extraordinary development



later (we often find amongst our pupils that music develops in a sudden spurt at adolescence), ~~we~~ shan't hold him back. At Nura's age it is impossible to forecast. The chances are that he will become a very capable musician and will return to his native Siberia to help in the development of Siberian music. That, I am sure, is what he would like to do.

The factors which are influencing the lives of our Soviet children are so different from those which influence children in other countries. I know this because I myself studied in Europe for years. There in Paris, in London, in New York, in Berlin, in Vienna, our music was merely a beautiful sanctuary from the misery and injustice of the outside world. Here with us, music is becoming one with the rest of life. We want our music to enhance all our other experience and help us to live more beautifully. No one in Russia, you know, would think life possible without music, without good music, and much as I love the culture of Europe, that is why I am happier here in Russia and I honestly believe that is why our students seem to be better adjusted to life. I am not a politician as you see. I am a simple professor of music. I am primarily interested in culture, and culture obviously can only be international. I should like to see not only the best music of all countries at the disposal of everybody, but the best of everything else too. All culture, all logic, points to internationalism. I teach my pupils Chopin, Coleridge-Taylor, Debussy, the glorious Germans, Wagner, Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, but I explain to them that the present rulers of Germany have denied Heine and exiled Einstein.

What are the factors that influence the life of our children ? I'll tell you.

When Fritz Heckert died here just before the spring, he was laid in state in the great hall of the Conservatoire (the same great

hall where Nura Tash Muchamedov squeezed in without permission to hear Thibault). All day and all night long the Gertzena was filled with the black figures of the Moscow workers in procession, marching through the melting snow, dipping their scarlet banners in memory of the great German Revolutionary. I remember how moved Nura was when the funeral march echoed through the twilight, as he sat listening by the radio to the funeral oration from Red Square:

“... The fight to release Thaelmann is the fight against war, and the fight against war is the fight to release Thaelmann. Our Comrade Heckert, one of the bravest and best fighters against fascist oppression has gone from us. Comrades, we will carry on his work. We will complete his work. . . .”



